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VISION AND THE MORAL ENCOUNTER:
A READING OF MURIEL SPARK'S NOVELS

by

Patrick G. McLeod

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

VISION AND THE MORAL ENCOUNTER:
A READING OF MURIEL SPARK'S NOVELS

by

Patrick G. McLeod

This thesis analyzes the novels of Muriel Spark in light of the vision of moral reality which is their sustaining feature. Largely informed by her Catholic consciousness, the moral order at the heart of the novels constitutes a twofold reality—the spiritual and physical planes of existence—awareness of which brings to the protagonists the burden of commitment. Vision reveals truth, but it also illuminates the fact of division between spiritual and physical ideals and values. As the novels progress, they reveal an increasing concern with the realization that man is unable to find fulfillment and happiness in both spirit and body. As manifested in the novels by the recurring elements of violence, perversion, war, and madness, the physical order is a moral abscess, the encounter with which drives the man or woman of vision to more and more extreme acts of withdrawal and isolation in order to escape its terror. Their flight, however, is not only from corruption but from happiness, since only in a union of the spiritual and physical orders can man be fulfilled on earth. Frustration and
suffering become the offspring of vision. The abiding truth is that defined in *Memento Mori* by the Four Last Things, of which Death is first and Heaven a distant last.

The first chapter of the thesis defines the terms of the conflict between spiritual and physical values which is the keynote of Muriel Spark's fiction, discusses her use of the supernatural in her fiction to convey a sense of multiple reality, and briefly compares her moral vision to those of Flannery O'Connor, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene. The remaining chapters deal with the individual novels, basically in a chronological order, to demonstrate how the author's moral outlook changes from one of joyful expectancy and embracing promise in *The Comforters* to the uncompromising commitment of *The Bachelors* and *The Girls of Slender Means*, and finally to the unavailing nature of *The Driver's Seat* and *Not To Disturb*. *Memento Mori* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* most effectively balance the vision of moral decay with spiritual promise, but even they emphasize not so much a fulfilling truth as a necessary endurance. *The Mandelbaum Gate* stands as the watershed in Muriel Spark's fiction, the novel in which she tries to reverse the direction of moral discovery and redirect it along more hopeful, more optimistic lines. Its failure, however,
stems from the inability of the author to lend credence to such a view, given the world she portrays. Her last three novels are the most negative in her canon, and there is evidence that her moral vision yields increasingly, though in a Christian context, to the influence of the modern absurdist writers.

Particular attention is paid throughout the thesis to the themes of marriage, art, and religion as embodying the positive forces with which man confronts reality. The failure of each as the novels progress only serves to illustrate the unmitigating nature of Muriel Spark's Augustinian vision of moral corruption and apocalyptic chaos. Hell is on earth, and nowhere's safe.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Form in the Modern Novel, a monumental enough abstraction in itself, presupposes the yet more enigmatic question of Order. The modern novelist faces an age that has generally denied an ultimate scale and measuring rod of existence other than science. With the death of God, any viable set of spiritual values sputtered to extinction, smothered by the grim necessities of scientific naturalism. Life became a meaningless struggle, to no end except the gaping exit of death. The existential hero vainly attempts to order chaos with his own being, but the futility of his endeavor will not be denied. Describing the fragmentation of unity and the isolation of the individual which followed the disappearance of God, J. Hillis Miller identified modern man—in Matthew Arnold’s terms—as "one of the 'poor fragments of a broken world.'"¹

Much of modern literature represents the artist’s attempt to ground his own reality in the truth and realism of his art. Such realism entails the depiction of things as they are, and, according to the modern canon, truth is seen to reside in the material and physical realities of existence, the reliability of the commonplace acting as its norm. It is to the commonplace, however, that Muriel Spark brings the transforming power of her imagination and her art, to render what is common obsolete and to transfigure the order of reality so that its rule of necessity might yield to the promise of possibility.
In recognition of her accomplishment and the "dazzling assortment of techniques" which produce it, Karl Malkoff writes that Muriel Spark creates "by cutting through the barriers of over-used language and situation a sense of reality true to experience, an imaginative extension of the world, a lie that shows us things as they are--a supreme fiction."  

In her first novel, The Comforters, Mrs. Spark immediately tackles the problem of co-existing physical and spiritual orders of being, and she does so in terms of art, specifically that of the novel itself. Struggling to adapt herself to the fact of her recent conversion to Catholicism and at the same time complete her study entitled Form in the Modern Novel, Caroline Rose is suddenly besieged by the clatter of an invisible typewriter which is writing her into a book. In fact, the unseen typist is also apparently writing the very book which we are reading. Toward its conclusion and after Caroline has finally finished "her book about novels," we learn that she herself is about to begin a novel about "Characters in a novel." The mystery of authorship and creative agency remains deliberately ambiguous. The degree to which Caroline is responsible for the writing of the novel depends upon the contrivances of the supernatural typist, and both factors are inextricably bound up in the convolutions of plot and subplot which tie this amazing, if endlessly complex, first novel together. As another character later discovers in The Mandelbaum Gate, "Knots were not necessarily created to be untied. Questions were things that sufficed in their
still beauty, answering themselves."

It is no coincidence that the chapter of her book which gives Caroline the most trouble is that dealing with realism. For Muriel Spark does not hesitate to disturb the framework of physical reality, even as the characters in her play *Doctors of Philosophy* deliberately shake the stage sets in order to stress that "Realism is very flimsy." Throughout her novels, there is the attempt to plumb surface reality in order to admit that greater reality which underlies it and whose dominant qualities are Mystery and Truth. Like Sister Helena in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* with "her odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception," Muriel Spark approaches this hidden order through "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace."7

In an interview with Frank Kermode, Muriel Spark explicitly states her aims and interests as a novelist:

...I keep in my mind specifically that what I am writing is fiction because I am interested in truth—absolute truth—and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than an imaginative extension of the truth—something inventive....There is metaphorical truth and moral truth...and there is absolute truth, in which I believe things which are difficult to believe, but I believe them because they are absolute.

In a later article, Kermode bluntly identifies this absolute truth as the teachings of the Catholic Church.9 Taken out of context, such a statement might unfortunately be misread as
restricting the intentions of the novelist to the dogmatic concerns of her faith. Yet nothing could be further from his own purpose, since in the same article he tries to demonstrate the universal appeal and application of *The Mandelbaum Gate*, her most explicitly Catholic novel, and point out those qualities which make it accessible even to the pagan conscience. The accomplishment is seen to rest in the novel's form and structure, its unity and internal order. It is precisely this realization of artistic truth, moreover, that broadens an understanding of that which she calls absolute truth. And the one cannot contradict the other, since truth must intrinsically support itself. Nonetheless Kermode has raised an important consideration that must be carefully explored if one is to grasp the full scope of Mrs. Spark's vision—that is, the relation of her faith to her fiction.

What French literary criticism refers to as "the problem of the Catholic novelist"--the dilemma in which the writer finds himself compelled by his artistic consciousness toward objectivity and disinterestedness, while his faith constrains him to bear witness to its own truths--has apparently seldom plagued the art or conscience of Muriel Spark. Her novels feature a number of Catholic characters, many of them converts like herself, but their treatment is neither always special nor, in many cases, even favorable. Catholic themes there undoubtedly are, but these generally serve a minor function in the overall moral outlook of her novels. *The Mandelbaum Gate*, exhibiting an unusual tension in this regard, is an
important exception, particularly since it is generally regarded as her most ambitious attempt thus far. The denouement, however, features a comfortable turning away from the problem. By a propitious error, the Catholic heroine is spared the painful necessity of alienating herself from the good graces of the Church in order to marry the man she loves. Arbitrary as the evasion of theological difficulties is, Mrs. Spark's convenient conclusion also implies a gently satiric slap at Catholic divorce laws. The Mandelbaum Gate displays that uncompromising attitude indicative of her refusal to admit a dilemma between the practice of her faith and the art of fiction. Aside from the novels, her personal comments would seem further to support this conviction.

Writing about her conversion, she states the naturalness of her belief and its easy coincidence to her art:

The Catholic Church for me is just a formal declaration of what I believe in any case. It's something to measure from. But I never think of myself as a Catholic when I'm writing because it's so difficult to think of myself as anything else. It's all instinctive. This obviously affects the characters I write about and the way I see life in my books.

Catholicism for Muriel Spark is not so much an imposition on her art as it is a fitting complement. A formal declaration of instinctive beliefs, her religion informs a moral order already perceived by her artistic consciousness. Furthermore, she finds in her religion the means of extending the scope of
her fiction and art. She calls her Catholicism "a Christian thing to me conducive to individuality, to finding one's own personal point of view."12 Expansion, not restriction, is the modifying keynote of her faith. Catholicism, therefore, is a confirmation for the believer of the truth grasped by the individual. Faith, defining as it does the length and breadth of an extended reality, provides the artist with a sweeping range of vision in which to evolve the exposition of the truth. It is within the "enormous scope" of the Catholic faith, Mrs. Spark declares, that she can speak with a voice more her own. For the satirist, and it is as such that she classifies herself, "The Catholic belief is a norm from which one can depart."13 The Church offers a concrete realization of the ultimate order of reality which the writer is able to translate and define in terms of her art. The presence of such an ideal provides an invaluable structure according to which human folly can be illuminated and discerned in its varying degrees and results.

It is to such a purpose that Mrs. Spark employs her imagination, her skill, and her belief. Human nature is her object, its weaknesses and failings her targets. Her own religion is no exception, and Mrs. Spark indicates little sympathy in her novels toward those Catholics who abuse and misunderstand, willfully or not, the practice of their faith. Yet the chief purpose of her art demands not merely the exposure of evil and the castigation of folly but the exploration and investigation, and hence the understanding, of
reality. To this end, she maintains an artistic integrity which frees her from the fear lest the dogmatic nature of her faith impinge upon her art. To W. J. Weatherby she simply confesses that "I don't feel committed that way." "What nonsense," she continues, "to think that the Catholic novelist should be governed in his art by Catholic directives from Rome." 14

It is not enough in this regard, however, to take Mrs. Spark solely at her own word, for what she has finally done in these statements is neatly to sidestep the question. Because the problem does involve such an important consideration of the objective value of her work, it is helpful to enlist the assistance of another Catholic writer, Flannery O'Connor, whose fiction also happens to bear the most striking resemblances in both theme and technique to that of Mrs. Spark.

Tantamount to the latter's own declaration of belief is Miss O'Connor's preface to the 1962 edition of Wise Blood, in which she declares that this novel

was written by an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one with certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. 15

Both Muriel Spark and Flannery O'Connor confess to the influence of their religion on their art, but neither concedes its presence as dictatorial or debilitating. Like Mrs. Spark's avowal of the freedom and individuality which
Catholicism has brought to her writing, Flannery O'Connor's claim for the orthodox Christian novelist, as opposed to the mere naturalist, posits "a larger universe" than that of sensory experience. 16 Reality must also embody the absolute truth--the Christian fact of God in the world. But as Mrs. Spark conceded, "this is one aspect of truth, perhaps."17 (my italics) Art also has a truth unto itself, and Miss O'Connor resorts to no less an authority than Thomas Aquinas to support her contention that art is good in itself, glorifying God because it reflects Him. "The artist," she says, "has his hands full and does his duty if he attends to his art. He can safely leave evangelizing to the evangelists."18 Yet how is one to consider the elements of violence, sexual excess, and the grotesque, common to the novels of both Muriel Spark and Flannery O'Connor, in the context of the Christian universe which the authors espouse? Flannery O'Connor explains them simply by reference to sense experiences as the means by which the novelist approaches a knowledge of the greater reality:

To be concerned with these things means not only to be concerned with the good in them, but with the evil, and not only with the evil, but also with that aspect which appears neither good nor evil, which is not yet Christianized....This all means that what we roughly call the Catholic novel is not necessarily about a Christianized or Catholicized world, but simply that it is one in which the truth as Christians know it has been used as a light to see the world by.19
Concern with truth is the basic premise of Mrs. Spark's fiction, and her novels must be read, if they are to achieve full significance, in light of the Christian reality which that truth supposes. Reaching beyond the strict confines of Catholic dogma, Muriel Spark probes the very heart of the Christian mystery and there discovers the union of the spiritual and the physical, the seen and the unseen, by which the fact of the Incarnation transfigures the commonplace order of reality. Rescued from the simple reduction to sensual experience, this new expansive reality widens the scope of vision to admit the infinite possibility of Mystery: "...that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula" and which Flannery O'Connor insists must abide in the fiction of the serious writer. Charles Alva Hoyt calls Mrs. Spark a surrealist Jane Austen whose novels reveal a "full acceptance of the mystery of life." Even more apt is the remark by Samuel Hynes that "her stories are more likely to create mystery than to explicate it, and she is content to leave the supernatural that way--Mysterious."

The truth of a Christian universe ultimately remains a mystery acceptable only on terms of faith, defying a corroboratory explication. Nor will Muriel Spark succumb to the role of apologist. As Ann B. Dobie notes, "Her purpose is to intrigue, not teach. She awakens the reader's imagination and curiosity instead of making firm the ideas which she brings to the novels." Only twice in her novels do we learn
the reasons for a particular character's conversion to Catholicism, and both examples represent, at least in the beginning, questionable intentions leading finally to firm convictions. From *Memento Mori*, we learn that Jean Taylor, the only character in the novel who truly grasps the tenets and demands of her religion, originally turns to Catholicism simply to follow the example of her employer. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Sandy Stranger gleans her early interest in religion, destined to lead her eventually to the convent, from a deep psychological absorption in her lover's mental processes. This preoccupation successively leads to rabid Calvinism and by a sudden turn to Catholicism, after which she renounces the world for the contemplative life of a nun. Mrs. Spark offers no surface explanation for such actions in these or her other novels involving converts. The world of her fiction often remains mysterious because of the quality of implicit Truth which governs it. At the same time, and again invoking Flannery O'Connor, that is a more embracing reality which conceives of the natural world as containing the supernatural, the agent of Mystery.²⁴

The role of the supernatural in her novels is essential to an understanding of the moral vision which Muriel Spark incorporates into her art. In four of her early novels, there is a direct intrusion of the supernatural upon the natural physical world. An invisible typewriter pecks away in *The Comforters*, while a repulsive, witch-like character
literally vanishes from sight again and again. The Ballad of Rye presents the maybe-devil, maybe-not Dougal Douglas testing the moral environment of a small community. Death places anonymous phone calls to the aged in Memento Mori, while spirits speak through mediums in The Bachelors. These incidents of supernatural visitation reflect the presence and function of spiritual reality in man's physical world. Flannery O'Connor would probably resent such liberties since fiction to her "should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete, observable reality."25 Yet Muriel Spark, a proven adept at the ghost story ("The Portobello Road" and others)26 sometimes chooses to ignore such criteria as called for by Flannery O'Connor in order to vent her imaginative talents in unusual and striking contexts. "Fiction to me is a kind of parable," she writes, "...Some kind of truth emerges from it, but it's not fact."27 Ann B. Dobie correctly applies this statement to the fantastic occurrences in these novels as evidence of Mrs. Spark's attempt to concretize and objectify a very real, though spiritual, side of reality.28 Nor does this spiritual element disappear with the supernatural intrusions. The moral background of the subsequent novels merely foregoes the fantasy of the parable, not the fact of the truth. Dobie sees the later fiction as a subtle, more credible depiction of the fact that the world of God and the world of man "are complementary parts of a whole and rich reality."29
To misunderstand the role of the supernatural, therefore, is to distort completely the moral order of Muriel Spark's art. On the other hand, to perceive how such a misreading can occur is to grow more aware of the complexities and intricate requirements of her purpose. In an article entitled "Muriel Spark and the Occult," Frank Baldanza provides the reader such an opportunity to analyze the failure of a limited critical approach.

Apparently identifying the supernatural only with the fantasy devices and the occult--e.g., the diabolism in The Comforters, the superstition and charms in Robinson, etc.--Baldanza argues that

What she is in fact doing, over the trajectory of her entire career, is experimenting with a series of solutions to the aesthetic problem of accommodating both the supernatural and the naturalistic in her works, with the result that the naturalistic point of view has, at least for the present, gradually gained ground over the occult, and has greatly subordinated the supernatural. 30

This conclusion is reached by means of his contention that human failing in the form of villainy, and not the intrusion of supernatural forces, is at the moral core of all her novels. True only in the qualified sense that man by his nature is inherently prone to weakness, such an argument only indicates the catalytic quality of the supernatural elements in elaborating a desired moral setting. Yet Baldanza specifies villainy as the human failing in question and stretches these
assertions to infer "that Mrs. Spark's moral vision is essentially secular and naturalistic (i.e., non-supernatural)."31 If he is correct as to the value of the occult and fantasy in her moral vision--and this is his only conception of the supernatural--he is patently in error both logically and critically in thereby reducing that vision to a purely secular context. The central plots of five of the first seven novels and the consequent focus of their moral situations is not necessarily governed by non-religious villains, as he argues. Using his own choice of examples, The Comforters is obviously more centrally concerned with Caroline's invisible author than with the machinations of Mrs. Hogg. Likewise, the impact of Memento Mori rests, not with the financial success of the scheming Mrs. Pettigrew, but with the various individuals' response to Death. And in the two novels which feature those whom Baldanza assails as religious culprits, the repulsive character of Mrs. Hogg implies a distaste not for the Catholic faith but rather for those practitioners who misuse it, while Sandy Stranger certainly has more than a political or spiteful reason for betraying Miss Brodie. It is important that she acts only after taking her religious turn. Nonetheless Baldanza generalizes "that the practice of a religious discipline is not very widespread, and where it does exist, it seems to make little difference one way or the other in terms of the moral or immoral acts of her characters."32
Most of his failure to understand the moral order of the novels stems from Baldanza's inadequate definition and comprehension of the spiritual element of that reality which Mrs. Spark envisions. He applies a scheme of ultimate reward and punishment to the characters in order to discern the author's sympathies. According to that system, however, he finds that Mrs. Pettigrew achieves ultimate reward because she inherits money, while fat Jane Wright in The Girls of Slender Means gains similar success as a leading gossip columnist. The Sparkling irony, so immediately at work in these two cases, somehow eludes him, so that the evidence produced by his scheme "can at the best be said to be mixed." Accordingly, he discovers that Chance is emerging as a considerable participant in Mrs. Spark's universe.

And so the argument continues, calculated to demonstrate the lack of a definite moral stance on the part of the author. Peckham Rye is found to produce no moral statement because Baldanza confuses the ambivalence of the protagonist with the unequivocal expose of the community which he engineers. Robinson is shrugged off since the "only interesting tensions in the novel involve questions of superstition." (Carol Ohmann, on the other hand, writes a lengthy discussion of the psychological and moral conflicts in the novel, an essay later supported by Karl Malikoff.) Finally, and this represents the height of misreading, the conversions and vocations of Sandy Stranger and Nicholas Farringdon are seen to be
treated "in a glancingly oblique manner that underplays their importance, and...[there are] ample hints that their life achievements were accompanied by enough cantankerousness and eccentricity to negate whatever good they did."\textsuperscript{37} Because he fails to grasp in the novels any conception of a spiritual ideal supported by an accompanying moral judgment, Baldanza fails to acknowledge why, if conversion and vocation are so obliquely unimportant, they nevertheless occupy such a central position and warrant such continual reference within the works themselves. Lacking the necessary focus to realize the depth and unity of reality in her moral world, Baldanza's study demonstrates the limited awareness such an approach to Mrs. Spark's art is bound to yield. What is essential to her work is the recognition that human existence is founded within a moral context of good and evil, right and wrong, and that man's consequent actions are judged not only in terms of temporal success and failure but, as Karl Malkoff suggests, "\textit{sub specie aeternitatis}."\textsuperscript{38}

Given the existence of a moral order which transcends time, it is necessary to evaluate the presence and effect of that structure in the everyday world. Applied to Mrs. Spark's fiction, this perspective from an eternal viewpoint reveals man in his physical order as a fallen creature in a ruined and ever-darkening paradise. \textbf{Robinson} concludes with an idea that the island offered a realm of experience in which "immediately all things are possible,"\textsuperscript{39} but this lyrical afterthought does not completely offset the image of an Eden
in shambles, finally sinking into the sea. Similarly, Peckham Rye ends in a transforming vision which promises "for an instant...another world than this," but the moment is only fleeting at best. What does abide in the fiction of Mrs. Spark is the daemonic atmosphere and latent savagery so terrifyingly evoked in The Bachelors and The Girls of Slender Means. John Updike calls her concerns "sulphuric and antic," enacted on the "terraces of purgatory." This preoccupation with a fallen world and its moral deterioration reflects a basic tenor more subdued in the earlier novels but which swells to increased proportions in the later works. Even The Comforters, the outcome of which involves general happiness for the sympathetic characters, is worked out against a dark background of perversion, crime, and ultimate violence. By Memento Mori, the world of universal possibility so joyously intoned at the conclusion of Robinson, writes Carol Ohmann, "dissolves before the world of absolute truth where 'the four last things to be ever remembered are Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven.'" The petty meanness of the aged grotesques who plot and scheme for their own interests, all the while refusing to acknowledge the near presence of Death, establishes in this masterful novel a solid realization of the emptiness and sterility of modern life in the face of a beckoning eternity. Peckham Rye too may hearken briefly to the embracing vision of Robinson, but what remains basically unchanged and inert after the flight of the hunch-backed enchanter is the moral torpor of the community.
It is this growing sense of the decay of spiritual and moral values in human affairs that characterizes the first four novels, a developing awareness on Mrs. Spark's part which reveals itself most emphatically in the recurring themes of sexual waste and physical violence. These elements are again subdued in *The Comforters*, but pervasive. Few licit sexual relationships exist in the novel, while bigamy and homosexuality sport their minor representatives. Death helps bring the book to a close with the violent, though accidental, demise of Mrs. Hogg. *Robinson* includes grotesque marriages, an obscene villain who courts the heroine by imputing homosexuality to his rival, and an attempted murder. Both *Memento Mori* and *Peckham Rye* deal with illicit sexual behavior, and both novels portray a grisly and brutal murder.

Coming ever more to the foreground of her fiction, these themes of sexual crudity and especially of violence begin to dominate, even as they define, the moral disintegration of the modern consciousness. A murder is conceived of as ecstatic fulfillment in *The Bachelors*, while Ronald Bridges is driven by the absurd hypocrisy of his world to envision it as "all demonology and to do with creatures of the air...."\(^43\) War echoing ominously in the background, Miss Jean Brodie tries to send one of her girls to the bed of her lover and does succeed in sending another to her death. Between V-E and V-J Days, a bomb explodes in the garden of the girls of slender means, and Nick Farringdon is driven by a vision of evil to martyrdom in Haiti. *The Mandelbaum Gate* poses a
Holy Land divided by war and governed by deceit and violence, and as the Eichmann trial winds its weary way detailing the record of human barbarity, an old lady in England is murdered by her insane housekeeper. A bizarre suicide committed by a husband in order to frame his wife as a moral degenerate is the crux of *The Public Image*, while *The Driver's Seat* depicts a woman's search for an unknown boyfriend who will kill her. *Not To Disturb*, her most recent and in many ways most terrifying novel, details the events of one night in a Gothic house of horror, replete with murder, suicide, lunacy, and sexual perversion.

Muriel Spark unveils in her novels a brutal world, bristling with a savagery that is as crude as the bludgeon murder in *Memento Mori* or as genteel as the Schiaparelli dress in *The Girls of Slender Means*. Fallen from grace, mankind has immersed itself to such a degree in the reality of the physical moment that it has lost sight of those values and truths which extend beyond time. Absolute truth is so clouded by the miasma of violence and disbelief rising from the dissolution of reality and the denial of the spiritual that it can often be grasped only through an understanding of its negative counterpart. Another distinguished Catholic novelist, Graham Greene, expresses a similar idea in his travel book *The Lawless Roads*:

And so faith came to one--shapelessly, without dogma, a presence above a croquet lawn, something associated with violence, cruelty, evil....
One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell.\textsuperscript{44}

As Ronald Bridges puts it in \textit{The Bachelors}, "The Christian economy seems to be so ordered that original sin is necessary to salvation." (88) It is this statement which Malkoff uses to identify what is the enigmatic core of Mrs. Spark's moral order: "The greatest good proceeds from evil; the Fall, separation from God and nature, is necessary to man's redemption."\textsuperscript{45} What Muriel Spark reveals is that enlarging vision called for by Flannery O'Connor--life felt "from the standpoint of the central Christian mystery: that it has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for."\textsuperscript{46}

An Augustinian world it is, seemingly bereft of grace and undoubtedly besieged by sin, but this is not the whole of reality. Awareness may lead to the agency of Faith which in turn can so transfigure the commonplace, with all of its meaninglessness and despair, that one is able to perceive an ultimate moral order beyond the limitations of weak physical nature. Life then assumes a different dimension when confronted by a reality other than physical fact. Judged in terms of eternity, and those are the final terms, man's actions must assume a more valid standard than temporal good and material success. Bearing this in mind, Mrs. Spark directs one at the beginning and at the close of \textit{Memento Mori} to a careful remembrance of the \textit{Four Last Things}.

The fact that heaven should be mentioned last among the categories of the Penny Catechism quoted by Mrs. Spark perhaps
strengthens the already obvious suggestion that happiness in her novels is a thing not easily attained. Updike remarks that the "possibility of redemption hovers over Sparkland rather bleakly," a thoroughly sympathetic view in light of the statement from The Bachelors that "it's a fairly bleak world when all is said and done." Nonetheless the possibility does exist and is achieved in the novels, but only with the concomitant growth and development of individual awareness. It may not seem like redemption according to the scales of value of the physical order, but true awareness must be more than physical. Vision is the mainstay of her fiction, the ability to perceive the gradations of reality and to act accordingly with responsible commitment. Each of her novels demonstrates the effect of vision, or the lack of it, on the daily course of human lives. Mrs. Spark demands that moral awareness, not to be confused with an ethereal contemplation of spiritual ideals, be put into action. Vision must be informed by response lest a sterile complacence lull commitment to sleep. Perhaps this is why the author seems intolerant of so many Catholic characters in her fiction. Faith may offer a fundamental order of truth and value, but the very acceptance of such a reality demands that the individual translate it into the terms of everyday life. The failure to so act when already in possession of the truth represents the more serious fault.

Muriel Spark conceives of her religion as offering the
greatest possible vehicle for individual expression and growth. Hence the sad irony and pity that Miss Brodie should shun the only Church to which she "was by temperament suited...; possibly it could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and diving spirit, it might even have normalised her." (125) Yet in Mrs. Spark's novels, Malkoff points out, it is "repeatedly made clear, [that] being a Catholic does not simplify giving form to one's life; it may even be a handicap."48 Caroline Rose's struggle with the invisible typist follows closely upon her conversion, and the connection between the attempt to preserve her independence as a character in a novel and at the same time live her newly acquired Faith is pointedly not coincidental. Religious commitment often demands sacrifice and suffering. Sandy Stranger resorts to the convent, Ronald Bridges to lonely midnight walks and the desperate recitation of St. Paul, and Nicholas Farringdon to martyrdom.

It is Barbara Vaughan, however, the pilgrim-heroine of The Mandelbaum Gate, in whom Mrs. Spark concentrates her most serious and most complicated effort to shape the vision to the physical order. Seeking to accommodate her love to her religion, Barbara becomes involved in a whole process of self-identification and individual awareness that leads her, as Malkoff indicates, to a "unity of being frequently sought but rarely found in Mrs. Spark's novels."49
Resolution, however, finally calls for recourse to the mysterious but consoling thought that "With God, everything is possible." (296) A happy error conveniently permits her lawful marriage in the Church, and though this seemingly forced conclusion may weaken the dramatic character of her decision, the moral deliberation and conviction of that choice is in no way lessened. The irony of the situation calls to mind the original felix culpa of the Garden and, in the context of the novel itself, Kermode suggests, the mistaken blessing at Beersheba. 50 What is evoked, if somewhat haltingly, is a sense of joyous mystery which, in a world of despair and disillusionment, permits the sacrament of possibility from a God of mercy and pity.

Derek Stanford has assessed Muriel Spark's position in the development of the "younger Catholic novel in England" as stemming from "the line of wit" inaugurated by Evelyn Waugh as opposed to "the line of pity" characteristic of Graham Greene. 51 His reasons for so evaluating her stem from his own conception of her primarily as a satirist and ironist, carefully avoiding the label of apologist in favor of moralist. The linking of her art to that of Waugh is undoubtedly helpful in acknowledging her skill and humor as a satirist. Indeed, she identified herself as such in 1961. Nevertheless her later novels seem to partake more and more of the terror and pity that dominate Greene's religious novels. The humor is still there, but coupled
with an increasingly ominous sense of doom and depravity. Since *The Girls of Slender Means*, there is also evident a growing preoccupation with madness and insanity that culminates with the nightmare quest of Lise in *The Driver's Seat* and the midnight howls of the lunatic heir in *Not To Disturb*. The world of her novels consequently resembles not so much the crumbling but still genteel Brideshead as the encroaching darkness of Greene's jungle. It is terror linked with compassion that attends the conclusion of *The Driver's Seat* with its somber refrain of "fear and pity, pity and fear."\(^52\)

In the end, it is possibly the greatest disservice to Mrs. Spark's art to limit her role and accomplishment to such a scheme as that essayed by Derek Stanford and others who claim for her frame of reference "the Catholic moral universe."\(^53\) Such a designation may immediately curtail the sense of scope and individuality which is the sum and appeal of her moral vision. As will be seen, her later novels also reveal an increasing reliance in tone and theme on the modern French writers of the absurd, a reliance which, while it does not preclude the claims of moral responsibility and awareness, puts them in the perspective of an influential, though very bleak, view of man in his world. Vision is Catholic for Mrs. Spark only insofar as it admits a higher plane of reality than physical existence and calls for the necessity of individual application in response to
that awareness. Even in relation to her Catholic characters, the theme is not so much the conforming of one's life to dogma as it is the general instilling into one's function as a man and a social being the realization of a spiritual order and its accompanying moral values. Value exists, not as an absolute and independent ideal, but in terms of human experience. The abiding order is able to include and accommodate various dogmatic differences without subjecting them to the rigors of theological analysis and distinction. Moral judgment rests on the formation of the individual consciousness according to the light of perception. Again is evident the reason for Mrs. Spark's demands on her Catholic characters who, according to her own belief, are in possession of the greatest truth and therefore liable to the greater responsibility. But the order of her moral universe, based as it is on truth, is ultimately extended by her art to include the awareness of the pagan and non-believer as well. This is the triumph of Mrs. Spark's skill, says Kermode, that whether or not readers accept the "immutable truths" of her own faith, they nevertheless recognize the established patterns in her novels as good and as valid, informed by an "imaginative cohesion, a rightness in the shapes, a truth sensed in the fictions." At the heart of her fiction then lie those "shapes of self-evident truth" which embody the power of her art and her vision. 54

The following chapters will trace the development of
vision in Muriel Spark's novels, a development which begins in wonder and joy at the Christian mystery of reality, moves toward a realization of the implacable conflict at the heart of that mystery, and concludes in her latest novel with an understanding of the absurd nature of a world which rejects the conflict even as it repudiates the mystery and truth of reality. The novels themselves reflect a richness and variety of imaginative experience that is the essence of an education into moral sensibility and awareness. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, education is described as "a leading out of what is already there.....",(54) and nothing could better describe the fictional technique of Mrs. Spark herself. Eschewing the role of Miss Brodie, that of imposing one's own implacable will and order on others, she chooses rather to confront her characters with a situation that calls for individual response and action. What is demanded of them is nothing less than the identification of themselves in relation to reality. The extent and nature of that reality depends on the quality of vision, the amount of insight into the subtle complexities of human existence and responsibility. At the core of her fiction is that compelling vision of truth to which faith and art can remain independently and simultaneously attuned. Commitment is its goal, responsibility its trust.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


34. Baldanza, p. 201.

35. Baldanza, p. 197.


Malkoff, Spark, p. 12.


38. Malkoff, Spark, p. 36.


42. Ohmann, p. 84.


45. Malkoff, Spark, p. 28.


47. Updike, p. 166.

48. Malkoff, Spark, p. 43.


51. Derek Stanford, *Muriel Spark* (Fontwell: Centaur Press, Ltd., 1963), p. 72. The publication of Stanford's book occasioned a minor furor in the correspondence section of *The Times Literary Supplement*. In a letter to the editor on October 4, 1963, Mrs. Spark assailed Stanford for writing the book without her consent or knowledge. In addition, she stated that her corpus up to that time was composed only of "a small group of minor sketches" which she thought "it a pity to dignify...by subjecting them to a whole work of criticism," especially in comparison to "the novels that I have in mind to do if I am spared." In reply the following week, Stanford declared that he had not intended the book as an extensive critical exercise, but then added: "it would seem that, with so modest an artist, her writing needs rescuing from the insignificance to which she relegated it."

Stanford's publisher expresses perhaps the most appropriate sentiment concerning the argument when he declares in the same issue that "I confess to this day I cannot see what the fuss was about, for as a study of her work it is, and attempts to be, no more than an examination of her progress to date, and contains in addition a fifty-five page 'Recollection' by an old and frankly admiring friend...."


CHAPTER II

FROM WONDER TO SIGH: The Comforters, Robinson, and The Ballad of Peckham Rye

Muriel Spark was almost forty years old before she published her first novel in 1957. Though she had achieved considerable success as both poet and short story writer, the novel seemed to offer no legitimate interest to her talent or ambition. It was only at the instigation of Macmillan's and under the patronage of Graham Greene that she was finally moved to initiate a new career which has resulted in the publication of eleven novels in the past fourteen years. The very productivity itself suggests quite a contrast to the Muriel Spark who, when first asked to write a novel, could confess that she "didn't think much of novels...it was an inferior way of writing."¹ By reason of her doubts concerning the value and possibility of the novel as an art form and because of her background and experience as a poet, she brought to her newly-assumed task an unusual awareness of the demands imposed upon her work by artistic integrity and the individual's private consciousness. Fiction became for her a vehicle for expressing the truth by "imaginative extension."² Discovery and mature experiment, therefore, mark her earliest novels as she accommodates herself to this new form of expression. Nor have these twin qualities of the explorative mind yet
abandoned her work, as attested even by a hostile critic after the publication of *The Mandelbaum Gate* in 1965—"what will this ingenious talent do next?" ³

The early stages of Mrs. Spark's fiction are best represented by *The Comforters*, *Robinson*, and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. ⁴ While each of these novels is distinctly different from the others in form, they all illustrate what will become basic themes to Mrs. Spark's later works. *The Comforters* rests on a complicated novel-within-a-novel device; *Robinson*, her only novel to employ the first-person narrative, borders closely on allegory; and *Peckham Rye* ostensibly employs a ballad-type structure in order to narrate the effect of a legendary figure on a small community. The three novels demonstrate Mrs. Spark's immediate concern with a definitive, though not necessarily dogmatic, morality and the response of the individual to its demands. For Caroline Rose and January Marlow, the respective heroines of the first two novels, responsibility entails their confronting the difficulties of a new-found Faith. The indomitable Dougal Douglas, on the other hand, though apparently beyond the moral code himself, nevertheless flays the hypocrisy of Peckham Rye's disintegrating moral fiber. Morality is seen to depend on the individual's awareness of reality and his consequent response to the then-perceived moral order. It is a sense of such moral awakening and discovery that lies at the heart of the first two novels, while in *Peckham Rye*
the perspective is reversed in order to reveal the stagnant corruption of a deadened moral awareness.

Also dominant in these early novels is a preoccupation with the role of the artist in determining, or at least participating in, a moral order. While *The Comforters* is the most obvious demonstration of this concern with its unseen typist and the eventual emergence of Caroline Rose as a novelist herself, *Robinson* and *Peckham Rye* also have their resident artist-figures. January Marlow is a successful journalist whose expansive capabilities render her a "general articulator of ideas," (18) and Dougal Douglas finally attains success as the author of "a lot of cock-eyed books." (158-159) In addition to the artist-figures themselves, *Robinson* and *Peckham Rye* also retain vestiges of the novel-within-a-novel technique so vital to *The Comforters*: January's journal and Dougal's autobiography of Maria Cheeseman.

Finally, these three early novels reveal a similarity in tone and in mood, which might be characterized as a general hopefulness attendant upon the happiness of the characters involved, that gradually disappears from Mrs. Spark's later works. Promise and joy mark the outcome of *The Comforters*; *Robinson* concludes with a reverie of visionary possibilities; and *Peckham Rye* closes with a sigh at what might have been. Even in the order of these novels, there is discernible a lessening sense of achievable happiness and a more sober,
increasingly somber, vision of man's place and possibility in the modern world. It is almost as if the excitement generated by her discovery of the novel as a valid vehicle for artistic expression, together with the fact of her recent conversion to Catholicism, stirred in Mrs. Spark something similar to the wonder which is the essence of *The Comforters*. But as that wonder gives way to awareness, so does the sense of imminent possibility begin to yield to the constraints of probability. Both *Robinson* and *Peckham Rye* thus end in fanciful musings which would seem to grow progressively irretrievable and insubstantial. Along with Mrs. Spark's discovery of the novel comes an implacable focusing of attention on the demands and responsibilities of truth. It is in these early novels that the background of her moral order first begins to assume shape and definition.

* * * * * * *

*The Comforters* was written as an experiment in form and value, an attempt by Mrs. Spark to come to terms with her new role as novelist and to explore the possibilities introduced by the process of fictional creation. Because of her earlier demeaning attitude toward the novel, she has remarked, *The Comforters* was an effort "to work out the technique first, to sort of make it all right with myself to write a novel at all. . . ."5 This first novel then is partly taken up with a complex and ambiguous struggle to determine the relationship between author and character,
and the demands on plot of reality and artistic responsibility. *The Comforters* works on two levels of consciousness: the fictional world of the novel itself, in which the characters are oblivious to the fact of their own fiction, and the awareness of Caroline Rose that she is being made a character in a particular novel. On the one hand, it involves themes of reality and order, while on the other it analyzes the narrative process which constructs those themes. As Karl Malkoff has noted, "*The Comforters* is a book not simply about the novelist's ways of knowing the world; it is also a study of ways of expressing this knowledge..." It is the integral unity achieved by these two concerns which renders this first novel such a remarkable tour de force.

Objective reality within the novel itself is the thread which weaves *The Comforters* into a composite whole. The extent of that reality lies in the understanding that Caroline's invisible writer actually exists within the framework of the novel and functions as the author of the book. While the novel might be "a book about obsessions," as Karl Malkoff maintains, it is nevertheless important to decide just what kind of obsession is valid and productive. Laurence Manders is obsessed with the criminal activities of his grandmother, the Baron with the supposed diabolism of Mervyn Hogarth, and Caroline with her mysterious voices. Malkoff links together these ingrained preoccupations to
demonstrate that all of the central characters "in one way or another distort the nature of reality." Thus, he continues:

...they create a reality of their own, they imaginatively extend the "real" world; and this, for Muriel Spark, who...referred to the writing of a novel as itself a kind of obsession, is precisely the function of the artist. Each man is, in fact, an artist in so far as he gives form to the flux in which he is immersed, each vision of the world is to a certain extent valid. However, since some artists are better than others, distinctions must be made. The Baron's fanaticism limits his view of the world, as does Laurence's cold objectivity. Only Caroline's world remains open to possibility; and she does in fact end by writing a novel.8

Malkoff's appraisal of the role of reality in regard to Mrs. Spark's conception of the artist is indisputable, but he does not go far enough when he claims that "Caroline's assumption of another plane of existence is...beyond corroboration."9 The Baron had assailed Caroline for asserting "a number of unascertainable facts," to which she had replied, "The evidence will be in the book itself." (181) At the end of the novel, we learn that Caroline writes a book, based upon her experiences, that is apparently The Comforters itself. Inexplicable as it is, Samuel Hynes concludes, the authenticity of Caroline's mysterious typist is thus proved by the very existence of her book,10 a fact that will strike Laurence with "wonder, and a curious rejoicing." (233)
Caroline's particular preoccupation is therefore valid, even if mysterious, and her discernment of another level of reality is finally the controlling vision of the book. She is the only one to realize that she is indeed a character in a novel, though Laurence suspects it. It is the quality of this insight which constitutes Caroline as a norm in the novel by which to measure the effect of such awareness on the individual and the demands entailed by a heightened reality.

Because he fails to grasp Caroline's own identification of reality as the basic framework of the novel, Derek Stanford misunderstands her motives, together with most of the other characters', as comprising only "an irresponsible attitude to life, regarding it as a potential entertain-

ment...."\textsuperscript{11} Consequently, he views her refusal to admit the hallucinatory nature of the voices as symptomatic of a lingering mental illness which finally merges with the "common world of objective perception" in a single warped unity.\textsuperscript{12} While Stanford correctly identifies a major motif in the novel, that of illness, he nevertheless misinterprets its final application by Mrs. Spark. Rather than concerning itself primarily with the process of deterioration, mental or otherwise, \textit{The Comforters} deals with the means of a renewed awakening and restoration that operates on many levels. Its theme, contrary to Stanford's argument, concerns a growth into perception rather than a decline of
Illness of one form or another is pervasive throughout The Comforters. From an over-all perspective, the social order depicted in the novel reveals a general malaise operating simultaneously on a spiritual and physical level. This quality is reflected in the various individuals who people the novel. Malkoff's suggestion of a conflux of limiting obsessions is certainly one facet of the social order, revealing as it does an almost solipsistic preoccupation with individual concerns. To that end, responsibility becomes the plight of the individual alone and assumes definition only in terms of the private consciousness as ruled by obstinate obsession. Yet illness is concrete as well as symbolic throughout the novel. Andrew Hogarth, the offspring of a disastrous marriage between Georgina Hogg and Mervyn Hogarth, is a physical cripple, the only kind of issue that could result from such an ill-conceived union between a "moral blackmailer" (163) and a frustrated artist unable to find his proper medium. Andrew's malady, however, is only symptomatic of a deeper moral deficiency inherent in the social order. Examples abound: the bigamous marriage of Mervyn Hogarth and Eleanor, Ernest Mander's homosexuality, Mrs. Hogg's vicious appropriation of moral righteousness. The Baron's rabid interest in diabolism and witchcraft is carried to extremes, but as he points out to Caroline, the genuine practice of these rites does exist.
Caroline tries to dispel his theory, which would amount to an acknowledgment of the active influence of evil, by recourse to the power of goodness; but as Ernest warns her, such is not the case:

"It depends on how you regard evil," Caroline said. "I mean, as compared with the power of goodness. The effectuality of the Black Mass, for instance, must be trivial so long as we have the real Mass."

"I wouldn't dismiss the power of evil lightly," Ernest insisted. "It does exist, obviously." (98)

In a lighter vein, the smuggling ring of Mrs. Jepp, the Baron, and the Hogarths, while operating on a basis that is comically acceptable largely because of the peculiar innocence of Mrs. Jepp, nonetheless partakes of a definite criminal element. That its activities involve pilgrimages to the holy shrines as a cover for procuring illegal diamonds and then transporting them in hollow religious statues demonstrates a vulgar reduction of religion to materialistic and illegal purposes. Mrs. Spark does handle the smuggling activities in a comic mood, but more serious inferences are also evident. It is particularly noteworthy that the Baron uses the shattered plaster images as evidence of diabolism and the active power of evil.

For Caroline Rose, the motif of illness is crystallized in the form of an approaching nervous breakdown. Withdrawing to the Pilgrim Center of St. Philumena after her
conversion to Catholicism, Caroline effectively goes into retreat, not in the organized religious sense, but as "a private retiring from customary activities, so as to possess one's soul in peace." (30) But peace does not come from simple withdrawal, and Caroline flees from the moral hypocrisy of her fellow Catholics, all the while trying to subjugate her fear and anxieties by the imposition of an artificial sense of order:

She excelled at packing a suitcase. She told herself, "I'm good at packing a suitcase," forming these words in her mind to keep other words, other thoughts, from crowding in...."Shoes there, Books here. The comb-bag in that corner. Blouses flat on the bed. Fold the arms. Like that. Then fold again. This way, that way....I am doing what I am doing."

In this way, she subjugated St. Philomena's for half-an-hour. She had devised the technique... at a time when her brain was like a Guy Fawkes night, ideas cracking off in all directions, heap in the centre. (34)

Up to this point, Caroline's mental strain follows quite closely Mrs. Spark's own nervous disorders after her conversion to Catholicism. Compare the description of her own state of mind at this time to that of Caroline's:

The first reaction I had when I became a Catholic was that my mind was far too crowded with ideas, all teeming in disorder. This was part of my breakdown. The oddest, most peculiar variety of themes and ideas of
all sorts teemed in my head. I have never known such mental activity. It made me suffer a lot. But as I got better I was able to take them one at a time. They became manageable and now I feel there's an inexhaustible fund of them.\textsuperscript{13}

It is also of interest that Mrs. Spark links her emotional suffering to "the religious upheaval and the fact I had been trying to write and couldn't manage it."\textsuperscript{14} It was after she had recovered from the breakdown that she produced \textit{The Comforters}.

The autobiographical parallel of her own case to that of Caroline's suffering allows a certain perspective from which to view the initial point of recovery in the novel. Just as Mrs. Spark marks her recovery by the ability to manage and formulate her thoughts—and it is at this time that she becomes a novelist—so is Caroline's cure initiated by her discovery of the unknown novelist. Before she hears the mysterious tapping of the typewriter, Caroline must impose upon herself a quietly frantic order of awareness that grasps reality only in the immediate act of one's existence, without consequence or purpose. This state of mind is best typified by her desperate packing of the suitcase with no other aim than a false deliberation. Upon hearing the novelist at work, however, her self-imposed order is shattered:

...she did not even notice, with her customary habit of self-observation, that she had thrown her
night-things together anyhow. The difference between this frenzied packing operation and the deliberate care she had taken, in spite of her rage, to fold and fit her possessions into place at St. Philomena's less than a day ago failed to register. (47)

It is no coincidence that this fact, important as it is in marking the first step toward Caroline's recovery, is immediately recorded within the novel as being tapped out by the invisible typewriter.

Samuel Hynes describes the theme of *The Comforters* as "the discovery, by an intelligent, sophisticated, slightly neurotic young woman, of the reality of the non-material; this discovery finds spiritual expression in her conversion, and psychological expression in her breakdown."¹⁵ The progress of her recovery follows the growth in her understanding of the art form into which she is being written. Before encountering her unseen writer, Caroline is engaged in writing a critical study, entitled *Form in the Modern Novel*, but work has bogged down in the chapter on realism. As the mysterious typing continues, she assails the author as an "irresponsible writer," employing a "phoney plot" and implausible characters. "I haven't been studying novels for three years," she says, "without knowing some of the technical tricks." (115) Yet the implausible is true, for the reader knows that Laurence's grandmother is indeed a smuggler, just as Mrs. Hogg is a vicious blackmailer. It is immediately after Caroline's critical attack on reality
that the car in which she and Laurence are driving crashes. In the hospital after the accident, Caroline begins to accept the premise of the novel, though she never suspends her critical judgment of its style. With this more complete acceptance of a mysterious reality beyond physical corroboration, Caroline grows to a greater understanding of the influence which that reality exerts upon her own independent actions. The more she grasps her function as character in a given reality, the more does she give form to its expression. Thus the typist notes:

Tap-tick-click. Caroline among the sleepers turned her mind to the art of the novel, wondering and cogitating, those long hours, and exerting an undue, unreckoned, influence on the narrative from which she is supposed to be absent for a time. (155)

The Comforters is, in a sense, the story of a novelist's education into her art. The identity of the unseen writer is finally unimportant in contrast to Caroline's understanding of the nature of reality. She has learned, in conjunction with Mrs. Spark, that the novel is "a pack of lies" which nonetheless conveys a very real truth. The one aspect of that truth repeatedly emphasized in The Comforters is the depth to reality beyond the face of mere appearance. The art of the novel plumbs the recesses of appearance in order to give a more complete expression to a truth which goes beyond the limitations of physical
sensation. The validity and purpose of that art assumes a greater degree of importance corresponding to the growing dimension of its concerns.

When Edwin Manders learns that Caroline is writing a novel, he implores her: "Make it a straight old-fashioned story, no modern mystifications. End with the death of the villain and the marriage of the heroine." Though she replies with a laugh, "Yes, it would end that way," (231) The Comforters itself concludes with a thoroughly mysterious incident, characterized by a joyous wonder, which calls to mind the Scriptural parable of the Sower:

His letter had failed to express his objections. He took it out of his pocket and tore it up into small pieces, scattering them over the Heath where the wind bore them away. He saw the bits of paper come to rest, some on the scruffy ground, some among the deep marsh weeds, and one piece on a thorn-bush; and he did not foresee his later wonder, with a curious rejoicing, how the letter had got into the book. (233)

This passage particularly reinforces the later contention by Mrs. Spark that her fiction partakes of the parable in its demonstration of truth. Moreover, it invests the conclusion of The Comforters, a book about the growth of the novelist into awareness, with an endorsement of the value and worth of the artist's undertaking. By a subtle parallel to the Word sown in the Gospel narrative, the novelist's task assumes an even greater importance and responsibility.
It is not that Mrs. Spark sees the novelist as the disseminator of spiritual truth, but rather that she claims for his role an undertaking that is at least similar in the seriousness of its efforts. Like religion, art has for its goal the expression of truth.

_The Comforters_ then is primarily a book about the novel, not a religious exercise. While it may contain references to the Catholic Faith, Mrs. Spark carefully refrains from using the novel as a vehicle for dogma. Most of the Catholic characters, in fact, exhibit certain excesses of their religion with which Mrs. Spark obviously finds fault. The presumptive complacency of the retreatants at St. Philumena's, the moral hypocrisy of Mrs. Hogg, and the irresponsible asceticism of Edwin Manders—all are the targets of Mrs. Spark's satire. When she can be taken as commenting seriously on the Catholic faith, it is usually in a tone that is coldly realistic. Caroline, for instance, assesses her Faith in terms of a struggle: "The demands of the Christian religion are exorbitant, they are outrageous. Christians who don't realize that from the start are not faithful." (38) Later we learn that she regards Ernest as "her sort of Catholic" because he is "critical but conforming. Ernest always agreed with Caroline that the True Church was awful, though unfortunately, one couldn't deny, true." (88-89)

The value of religion in the novel stems from the fact that it provides Caroline with the awareness of a spiritual
reality prior to her encounter with the hidden novelist. It is her Faith which prepares and even sustains her in her awareness of multiple realities. She first argues with Laurence that "we don't know all the possibilities of the natural order." (68) When he continues to question her conviction that the voices are real as being spiritually dangerous and in conflict with her Faith, she coolly replies: "There are spiritual dangers in everything. From the Catholic point of view the chief danger about a conviction is the temptation to deny it." (105) Finally, it is the outlook on reality afforded by her Faith, its freedom and possibility, that enables Caroline to confront the art of the novel: "I intend to stand aside and see if the novel has any real form apart from this artificial plot. I happen to be a Christian." (117) As noted by Frank Kermode, there is a further implication of religious consideration in the theme of free will and the relation between characters and novelist to the authorship of God.\textsuperscript{17} The theme remains minor, however, and, in Malkoff's view, "indirectly involved" when compared to the other "pointedly non-Catholic" concerns.\textsuperscript{18} The focus of these concerns is the nature and extent of reality, a question to which \textit{The Comforters} seems to open endless possibilities. The richest and truest of experiences lies in accepting this expanded awareness of reality, the achievement of which paradoxically creates a unity of vision. Before her re-
religious and artistic conversion, Caroline had lived in a "half-world." (87) At the end of *The Comforters*, however, she attains a unified outlook which renders "coherent" the narrative into which she has been written, a condition satisfied when she is "at last outside, and at the same time consummately inside it." (206)

If the theme of *The Comforters* is, as Mrs. Spark has stated, "a convert and a kind of psychic upheaval," and its conclusion rests on the acceptance of diverse, but nonetheless compatible, elements of reality, there is in the beginning of the novel an early statement as to the final effect and promise of that vision. Louisa Jepp, whom Derek Stanford calls "the only lovable female character" in Mrs. Spark's fiction, already possesses that expansive awareness that is achieved by Caroline only after the most painful effort. Mervyn Hogarth tells Mrs. Jepp:

"I understand you, Louisa. You can't bear to participate in separated worlds. You have the instinct for unity, for co-ordinating the inconsistent elements of experience; you have the passion for picking up the idle phenomena of life and piecing them together." (18)

Mrs. Jepp remains undisturbed by the variety of experience. Nothing dispels her sense of equanimity: not Laurence's discovery of her smuggling activities, Caroline's turn to religion, Mrs. Hogg's perpetual interference, nor Andrew Hogarth's miraculous cure. At the same time, she is the
only character for whom Mrs. Spark uses the present tense to declare that "She is still alive. . . .", (7) a fact all the more striking since it is later remarked "that the characters in this novel are all fictitious, and do not refer to any living persons whatsoever." (74)

It is Mrs. Jepp's marriage, and not Caroline's, with which the novel closes, thereby suggesting a perpetual vitality to her undaunted acceptance of life. George Greene writes that Louisa Jepp, in contrast to Caroline's religious outlook, "accepts life on the level of nature." She endures, it is implied, in a more secular context than the Catholic heroine. While she thus functions as an effective balance to religious connotations in the novel, it is nevertheless important to realize that her presence does not necessarily deny them. Her last remark in the novel is to correct a false impression of her religious practices: "It is not strictly accurate to say that I am not a regular churchgoer as I go to church regularly on Remembrance Day." (230)

The over-all tone of Mrs. Spark's first novel is ultimately one of happiness and achievement, concluding joyfully with the resolution of difficulties. To return to Derek Stanford's evaluation of The Comforters is to clarify the error of his argument. He writes:

If, therefore, one wishes to describe The Comforters as anything else than a fantasy,
brilliantly sufficient in its own right, then it is as a parable of the individual's isolation, his lonely self-centeredness, that one might read it. 22

Stanford's conclusion, however, actually describes the state of affairs at the beginning of the novel and fails to perceive that it is the working out of these difficulties which comprises the novel's resolution. The sense of isolation governed by the motif of illness gives way to a feeling of cure and restoration. Besides Caroline's physical and psychic recovery, Andrew Hogarth is restored to health by a miracle, and the Baron is at least "having treatment in a private mental home and, according to accounts, loving it." (229) Since Mrs. Hogg is a "gargoyle" with "no private life whatsoever" (177) and exists solely by reason of her interference in the lives of others, she is the convenient victim of an accidental drowning; and only "God knows where she went." (225)

**The Comforters** is a remarkable first novel detailing the discovery by an artist of the power and possibility of her craft. Ambiguous by the very nature of its subject, it may fail to attain the balance and completeness of expression evident in *Memento Mori*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Bachelors*, and *The Girls of Slender Means*. Nevertheless, the witty brilliance of its conception and the power of Mrs. Spark's imagination enable **The Comforters** to stand alone as a highly successful novel and, together with the
four above, rank among the most memorable of her achievements thus far.

* * * * * * * *

Having characterized The Comforters as "an epistemological novel, emphasizing man's relation to the external world," Karl Malkoff suggests that Robinson "turns inward and analyzes the nature of the self."23 There is immediately noticeable in the second novel an attempt to concentrate action within a very limited frame of reference, apparently the result of Mrs. Spark's determination, writes Carol Ohmann, to avoid the "'kind of wantonness'" displayed in The Comforters by "'stick[ing] to a plot'" and a "'formal outline.'"24 The story unfolds almost exclusively on the island of Robinson, "a minute green rock in the Atlantic," (135) and primarily concerns itself with the relationships between a trio of plane-crash survivors, a withdrawn ascetic, and his young ward. Attention is even further telescoped--into the consciousness of the narrator, January Marlow--by her opening remark that the island was almost "a time and landscape of the mind." (1) As Malkoff observes, allegorical inferences become obvious: the island is shaped like a human being, so much so that particular regions are named after corresponding parts of the body, "the inner man" being suggested "by a seething volcano ('The Furnace') and a system of secret tunnels."25 Analyzing the structure and development of the novel in the light of this allegorical
reduction, Carol Ohmann discovers Robinson to be a detailed working-out in Freudian terms of the psyche of the narrator. Because of its thorough and convincing argument, Miss Ohmann's study must be considered essential to a comprehensive understanding of the novel and her basic contentions at least summarized.

Read as psychological allegory, the plane crash which thrusts January onto the island represents a violent climax to the struggle by repressed instincts to assert themselves. (Malkoff interprets the conflict in regard to January's recent conversion to Catholicism, a religious commitment demanding repression of the lower instincts.) Following the accident, which corresponds to a nervous breakdown, the action involves the restructuring of the psyche, or January's recovery, by a stabilizing union of the superego, ego, and id, respectively represented by Robinson, Jimmie Waterford, and Tom Wells. While Robinson assumes a type of overbearing authority to which January first subscribes but later resents, Tom Wells reveals a repugnant sense of ruthlessness and animal desire. Jimmie is the agent of compromise, yielding to either extreme. Imbued on the island with perceptions of "a preancestral quality" and moved by "a primitive blood-force," (3) January feels impelled to worship the moon, a superstitious instinct that faintly aligns her with Tom Wells, the peddler of charms and tokens. Upon Robinson's disappearance and the simultaneous loss of the
superego, order is destroyed and January is almost killed by Tom Wells in an underground tunnel, an appropriate setting for the struggles with the id. With the suppression of the id (Wells is knocked down and January escapes), Robinson reappears and the superego again assumes charge. The liberated unconscious is suppressed, and a form of psychic order is restored.

Up to this point, it would seem that what has been enacted is not so much a psychological resolution as a form of repetition. January is apparently reduced to the same position as immediately following the crash, that of submitting to an unacceptable authority. Her recovery, however, does not stop here but continues only upon her refusal to accept Robinson's "impossible 'system,'" dictated as it is by his implausible behavior, and her substitution in its place of a moral system based on religious Faith and the efficacy of grace. Over Robinson's objections, she teaches Miguel the rosary. This is her emphatic avowal, by which

...she rejects her old conscience and forms, as it were, a new one, neither so strict nor so dangerous. Robinson's motto is "Nunquam minus solus quam cum solus"; January's becomes, in effect, the Ave Maria... she acknowledges her human weakness and asks for strength that may come from spiritual forces outside herself. Religious in its sanctions, her conscience is also social in its expression. She has taught the child the rosary. And she returns once again to the world she has left.
The value of Miss Ohmann's analysis is supplemented by her awareness of elements other than psychology and allegory in Robinson. Instead of interpreting the book solely as the case study of a fragmented consciousness, she correctly identifies Robinson as "a primer" to the later novels, spelling out "the essential nature of Mrs. Spark's moral vision and the strategy by which she works to persuade us to it." As in The Comforters, Mrs. Spark here uses the dual themes of religion and art to define the background of that vision.

Theologically, it would seem that Robinson and Wells are direct opposites, the one an avowed opponent of superstition and the other its apostolic salesman. Malkoff supports this claim by referring to January's analysis of Robinson: "Mariano-ology was identified with Earth mythology, both were identified with superstition, and superstition with evil." In a very real sense, their opposition stems from differing conceptions of reality. Both admit to a belief in a spiritual or supernatural order, but each places that order in a different context to the physical world and material objects. While Wells sees the supernatural as immanent and directly influential in the physical realm, he subscribes to the notion that its power and influence have been concentrated in certain charms and tokens, the possessor of which can ultimately control his own fate and fortune. Robinson, on the other hand, banishes the idea of any participation of
the spiritual order in material reality and consequently abhors the presence of superstitious objects, among which he includes the rosary.

To this conflict of supernatural awarenesses, January brings the compromising agency of her Faith. In tune with Wells' superstitious tendencies, she experiences on the island a "sweet and dreadful urge" to worship the moon, until she suddenly realizes, "I am a Christian." (3) Instinctively sensitive to a supernatural order, she is nonetheless able to subject that awareness to the stabilizing influence of her religion and thereby recognize the incongruity of ascribing spiritual powers to material objects. Like her, Robinson is a Catholic, but he has left the Church in objection to its stand on Marian devotion, which he considers heretical and in error. When he refuses to give January her rosary, the practice of which he regards as superstitious, she angrily retorts, "To hell with you.... There's nothing superstitious about the rosary. It's a Christian devotion, not a magic charm." At this point, she comes to understand the crux of Robinson's fanaticism:

It struck me for the first time that he was not simply attempting to make small difficulties, or to exercise his authority on the island simply from a need for power, but that he was constitutionally afraid of any material manifestation of Grace. (102-103)

Just as Wells impregnates material reality with the
supernatural to such an extreme that he eradicates any distinction, so Robinson works to the opposite extreme, allowing the spiritual no commerce at all with the physical. For Wells, the supernatural can only function insofar as it concerns the natural--i.e., the physical. Good luck he therefore suitably describes as "Long life and happiness." (52) Robinson, who is in many ways a more serious and more critical version of the type of failure represented by Edwin Manders in The Comforters, effectively severs connections between the physical and spiritual orders. By rejecting his Church's recognition of Mary as mediatrix, the physical link between God and man, Robinson is left with a disjunctive view of reality which discovers the spiritual and the material to be two unconnected and independently co-existing orders. To a much more severe extent than Manders, who is also retiring into ascetic seclusion, Robinson withdraws literally from society into both physical and spiritual isolation. Manders was spared by his family from involvement in mundane matters because of his utter inability to cope with or even apprehend them. Robinson, however, actively eschews responsibility. His island, enhanced by legend and history, is falling into ruin, its lack of produce symbolic of his own sterility. January wanders in "the small neglected garden" and sits in "the neglected patio... watching the fountain that did not play." (14) His refusal to accept responsibility reaches its most extreme proportions,
however, when his arbitrary disappearance, carefully dis-
guised as murder and totally without concern for its outcome
on the others, almost results in January's death. His
ineptitude and moral impotence are symptomatic of a severely
limited sense of awareness which consequently distorts both
moral and physical responsibilities.

January's Faith enables her to grasp reality in both its
spiritual and physical components as comprising an interde-
pendent unity of relationships. Thus is seen the symbolic
importance of her success in teaching the rosary to Miguel.
Throughout the novel, the boy is drawn alternately to
Robinson and Wells. The latter offers him good luck charms,
thereby implying a system which reduces supernatural value
to the level of material fortune, while the former demands
denial of the tokens, unable to proffer a system other than
that imposed by his own authority and isolation. Through
the rosary, however, January is able to give the boy a
concrete symbol of the spiritual and physical orders in
proper alliance, the true understanding of which will enable
him to assign to each its proper value. In the end, her
success is cemented by Miguel's leaving Robinson in order
to go to a Catholic school.

If Mrs. Spark's themes in *Robinson* are sometimes pecul-
iarly Catholic, her tone is by no means doctrinaire or
restrictive. She uses her religion as a measuring stick
of reality and not as a tool of dogmatic propagation.
a more secular context, the theme of art provides her a similar gauge with which to probe her subject. In many ways, Robinson continues to explore that concern which is inherent, according to Kermode, in The Comforters--"the question of what kind of truth can be told in a novel." 31

January's journal is another form of the novel-within-the-novel, just as January herself is another version of Caroline Rose. Though not strictly a novelist, she calls herself a journalist only because "it provided an approximate category to poet, critic, and general articulator of ideas." (18) Like Caroline in her novel, January struggles to work out the truth of her situation in the pages of the journal: "Most of all," she tells us, "it is the journal that gives me my bearings." (1) When Robinson gives her the exercise book, he instructs her to "Stick to facts." (13) Upon his disappearance, however, she uses the journal to formulate her interpretation of the facts and arrives at the logical conclusion that Robinson has been murdered. But the facts lie; Robinson has not been murdered, though January herself is almost killed because of what she writes in the book. "Through my journal," she tells us near the beginning of the novel, "I nearly came by my death." (1)

The art of writing as a form of interpreting the truth becomes a dangerous business in Robinson. The same is also true in The Comforters, for Caroline's automobile accident and near drowning both stem directly from her involvement
in the plot which is being structured by the mysterious typist. For Mrs. Spark, the role of art in recording the truth is a serious undertaking, a fact she underscores by the circumstances attending January's and Caroline's attempts to do so. Robinson tells January that keeping to the facts "will be the healthiest course," (13) and it is not, in fact, until she begins to interpret the facts with an unfavorable consideration of Tom Wells that her life becomes endangered. Nevertheless, it is the bare facts and the truth which they reflect to which she remains doggedly committed: "...I was half doped, my imagination overwhelmed. I could hardly look at the facts, far less piece them together, but I felt bound to impress on Jimmie and Tom Wells that I was capable of doing so." (117)

Nancy Potter writes that in Robinson, "the commonplace is transfigured by the nervous imagination of the narrator.... [who] metamorphosizes new situations out of what seems real."32 Her argument refers especially to those parallels glimpsed by January between the elements of society on the island and those back in England. While these "transfigurations" successfully reflect basic similarities and contrasts, thereby attaining some form of the truth, Miss Potter does not pursue the basic point: January does not carry the technique over into her journal. She loses the truth by adhering to that incomplete reality represented by "the facts." Physical evidence belies the more complex realities
surrounding Robinson's disappearance. Reliance on the physical alone is inadequate, resulting in a distortion of the truth. In art, Mrs. Spark reiterates, that truth can be attained only through an imaginative expansion of awareness, which does indeed transfigure the commonplace.

While themes of recovery and reintegration of the self function conspicuously in Robinson as in The Comforters, their role is much more qualified and limited, imparting to the novel a less expectant, less exultant tone. January is restored to society, but society itself remains largely unrestored. Wells is finally imprisoned, it is true, just as his counterpart in The Comforters, Mrs. Hogg, was drowned, but the disposal of his active villainy does not completely alleviate the sense of unfulfillment and quiet disorder in that society to which January returns. For she must again encounter those elemental figures who are, in the novel, the symbolic embodiment of the larger society as a whole—her sisters, Agnes and Julia, and their respective husbands, Ian Brodie and Curly Lonsdale.

Earlier in the novel, January remarks that "the only common ground" between herself and her sisters was "our childhood." (11) There is no indication at its conclusion that the situation has changed or that a level of meaningful communication has been established. More important, however, are the constant parallels which are being drawn between Robinson and Brodie, Wells and Lonsdale. Julia's
husband, a bookie who operates just on the right side of
the law, seems to embody a quality of illicit but vibrant
sensuality. Vaguely linked by comparison to Wells at the
beginning of the novel, Curly Lonsdale finally emerges in
contrast to the criminal ruthlessness of the former as the
kindest of January's relatives--"I wondered how ever I
could have thought of Tom Wells bearing any likeness to
Curly." (181) While Curly helps to offset the negative
influence of Wells, his role as restorer is eclipsed by
the more dominant and unchanging character of Ian Brodie.
It is in Brodie, the other half of Robinson, that Mrs. Spark
personifies the diseased society of which the island was
only a microcosm.

If only because of his dominance in January's thoughts,
Ian Brodie represents a central influence in society-at-
large comparable to Robinson's authority exercised on the
island. January constantly remarks the similarities be-
tween the two men, though she is careful to note that Brodie
is a more exaggerated and more vicious version of Robinson.
"And whereas I could never really dislike Robinson," she
says, "I hated Ian Brodie's guts." (83) Like Robinson,
Brodie is a rabid foe of Marian devotion: "a miserable
minimist," (83) January calls him, who raves about the
"materialistic heresy" (94) of Mariolatry. A doctor by
trade, he uses his medical authority to joke about his
sister-in-law having cancer of the womb, causing January
to wonder, "What cancer of the soul is venting itself?" (174) The theme of moral sterility, already suggested on the island by the broken fountain and the neglected cultivation, is strongly reinforced by Ian's sexual impotence.

Two societies, then, are portrayed in the novel, and the restoration process at work in each of them is, at best, ambiguous. Due to volcanic disturbance, the island is sinking into the sea, forcing Robinson to evacuate. The fact that he leaves the island, however, does not necessarily indicate an end to his spiritual alienation. January, in fact, pictures him "wearily moving his possessions on to some boat bound for some other isolation." (185) His counterpart, Ian Brodie, still thrives at the novel's conclusion, though his influence had been frustrated, at least temporarily, by the decision of January's son to remain with Julia and Curly during her absence on the island. Most important, however, and in direct contrast to The Comforters, Robinson does not end on a coda of love and marriage. January and Jimmie break off their relationship after leaving the island, and she returns to her son who, like Miguel on the island, appears to offer the only true means of redemption, and that through an awareness of responsibility.

The acceptance of responsible commitment, in both social and religious terms, marks the conclusion of Robinson. The island experience is seen in retrospect as a learning process, a restructuring of the self according to a new
awareness of reality. January herself casts the quality of this vision according to the molding process of the artistic imagination, which discovers the further truth beyond appearances:

Even while the journal brings before me the events of which I have written, they are transformed, there is undoubtedly a sea-change, so that the island resembles a locality of childhood, both dangerous and lyrical. (186)

Like another Eden, the island offers the promise of vision and truth; by the same token, it implies the danger of failure. Symptomatic of the modern society which it represents, the island is a paradise gone to ruin, an ideal of the past accessible only through reverie, even as January can communicate with her sisters only through childhood remembrances. The ambivalent imagery illustrates Mrs. Spark's own growing awareness of the difficulties facing a moral consciousness in conflict with that secular society which is the product of the modern mind. It is commitment rather than happiness which must accordingly direct January's moral awareness. Nevertheless, her assumption of responsibility does not thereby destroy that vision of truth by which she is able to see things as they might be. Consequently, it is on the note of vision that the novel comes to an end, emphasizing for the time being the possibilities revealed by the new awareness instead of the probabilities entailed:
And sometimes, when I am walking
down the King's Road or sipping
my espresso in the morning—feeling,
not old exactly, but dusty
and adult—and chance to remember
the island, immediately all things
are possible. (136)

"As cleverly as Robinson is wrought," writes Karl
Malkoff, "its success is limited in that its finest qual-
ities are understood rather than felt."33 Her second novel
remains one of Muriel Spark's least successful attempts,
"the one novel," according to Samuel Hynes, "that is clear-
ly inferior to the others."34 Carol Ohmann pinpoints as
the novel's main weakness that same lack of "felt" life
observed by Malkoff, but she further analyzes its failure
as deriving from the too theoretical embodiment of Freud's
"schema of the mind" in character portrayal.35 Apt as these
criticisms are, they in no way deny the importance of
Robinson in the general development of Mrs. Spark's moral
vision and the technical aspects of her art. Similar to
Miss Ohmann's identification of Robinson as a primer is the
important qualification attached by Malkoff to his criticism
of the novel:

Like The Comforters self-consciously
formal, Robinson solves technical
problems and tests a framework with-
in which the turmoil of emotional
upheavals can be expressed in con-
trolled form, and helps establish
the basis for future work.36

* * * * * * * *

The Ballad of Peckham Rye presents just such another
framework for Mrs. Spark to shape and form her moral vision as it has evolved through The Comforters and Robinson. Though published after Memento Mori, Peckham Rye can be best appreciated in relation to the first two novels because, like them, its technique and formula of development involve a similar attempt to come to terms with the artistic presentation of a burgeoning moral awareness. Peckham Rye lacks the quality of completeness, the sense of definition, which marks the themes of Memento Mori and the three novels immediately following it. Like her first two novels, it constitutes a basic experiment in form and presentation. The Comforters wove a complicated network of omniscient viewpoint and authorial intrusion to focus attention on a small group of basically dissimilar individuals as they became characters in a novel. Robinson adopted the limited awareness of first-person narrative to analyze, not only "the workings of a human mind" on which Malkoff elaborates, but the moral character of society as presented in a micro-cosm. Peckham Rye, according to Charles Alva Hoyt, "celebrates as in the manner of a border ballad the coming of Dougal Douglas among decent folk, and the resulting smash of all their foolish ambitions. . . ." In addition, Dougal Douglas's ghost-writing of the autobiography of an aging actress parallels Caroline's novel and January's journal. Finally, the society of Peckham Rye, like that of the other two novels, is appraised within a moral context,
but one which remains free of specifically Catholic suggestion or interpretation.

Central to an understanding of Mrs. Spark's intention in Peckham Rye is the recognition of what becomes the focus of attention in the novel, the character of Dougal Douglas or the society in which he moves. The very title of the book betrays its main concern: it is the story of Peckham Rye and only incidentally of Dougal Douglas. George Greene writes that Mrs. Spark's appellation of ballad indicates that the novel "applies the willful omission of connectives of an older literary form to a modern situation."39 The modern situation is the lack of moral depth in society, the loss of all traditional value, religious and otherwise, save the desire to maintain the outward appearance of decency and to cultivate a happiness primarily based on material wealth. Dougal's function is to serve as a test of Peckham's moral character; he is "a moral catalyst," says Malkoff, "the cataclysmic event in the novel that jolts reality into a new perspective."40 Dougal's role is revelatory, not of himself but of those with whom he comes into contact. He does not so much directly cause the more important events which take place; rather, he indirectly brings to a head forces and feelings already imminent or suppressed. Dougal is a releasing agent of the bottled-up conscience and consciousness of Peckham Rye. Karl Malkoff concludes:
...he represents simply a force, a source of energy which takes on moral significance in relation to people, in this case the community of Peckham Rye. For in spite of Dougal's fascination, the community is the true focus of the novel. 41

The community of Peckham Rye revolves around and is dependent upon two rival textile factories, Drover Willis and Meadows, Meade & Grindley. Industry, the giant of material endeavor, lies at the core of social endeavor and responsibility. Mr. Druce hires Dougal for the latter firm in order "to bring vision into the lives of the workers," (17) by which he means to render the laborers more amenable to Industry's goal: "Conserve energy and time in feeding the line." (18) Willis hires Dougal, posing as Douglas Dougal, for the similar purpose of industrial relations, but only because Dougal has the insight to perceive what lies at the heart of Industry--material advancement. To Willis's query as to why he, an Arts man, wishes to enter Industry, Dougal wisely replies, "I think there's money in it." Willis congratulates him: "That's the correct answer. The last candidate answered, 'Industry and the Arts must walk hand in hand,'...His answer was wrong." (77)

While his employers envision one goal, the cure of absenteeism in the factories, Dougal acts toward quite another, the discovery of Peckham's moral character:

"The world of Industry...throbs with human life. It will be my job to take the pulse of the
people and plumb the industrial depths of Peckham."

"I shall have to do research...into their inner lives. Research into the real Peckham. It will be necessary to discover the spiritual well-spring, the glorious history of the place, before I am able to offer some impetus." (18-19)

Later, he is able to tell Willis "that the moral element lay at the root of all industrial discontents...." Elaborating still further, Dougal then defines the four categories of morality which characterize Peckham:

"Take the first category, Emotional. Here, for example, it is considered immoral for a man to live with a wife who no longer appeals to him. Take the second, Functional, in which the principal factor is class solidarity...of which the main manifestation these days is the trade union movement. Three, Puritanical, of which there are several modern variants, monetary advancement being the most prevalent gauge of the moral life in this category. Four, Traditional, which accounts for about one percent of the Peckham population, and which in its simplest form is Christian. (93-94)

Malkoff notes that the characters in the novel illustrate all the categories but the last. The traditional Christian morality, however, does have a representative in Nelly Mahone, the eccentric fanatic "who had lapsed from her native religion on religious grounds," (14) and who wanders through Peckham and the novel quoting passages from
Scripture. Nelly makes a significant appearance at the conclusion of the first chapter, commenting ambiguously on Dougal's departure: "Praise be to God who employs the weak to confound the strong and whose ancient miracles we see shining even in our times." (14) Whether her prayers are of thanksgiving for Dougal's influence or of relief at his departure, Nelly's presence lends a degree of Christian awareness to the framework of the novel. It is more than fitting, however, that she represents a decadent, ineffective version of traditional Christianity, the only kind suitable to the perverse sense of morality which underlies the whole of Peckham. Consequently, it is no surprise that excavations beneath the city uncover a tunnel formerly used by an order of nuns to decamp from the community and their accumulated debts. Thus is discovered "the spiritual well-spring" of Peckham Rye. Now strewn with their bones, the tunnel is a somber reminder of the loss and decay of spiritual value in Peckham. Its discovery coincides with Dougal's appearance and his uncovering of Peckham's moral character. Shortly after his flight, it is "closed down owing to three scandals ensuing from its being frequented by the Secondary Modern Mixed School...." (155) There is the indication that with Dougal's disappearance Peckham Rye again assumes its mask of decency and hides from view the terrifying image of itself evoked by Dougal's presence. What continues to abide in the community as a whole is that
type of moral outlook espoused by Willis in response to Dougal's categories:

"Which of the four moral codes would you say was most attractive, Mr. Dougal?"

"Attractive?" Dougal said with a trace of disapproval.
"Attractive to us. Useful, I mean, useful." (94)

Yet Dougal does bring in his tow the possibility of vision, the possibility of expanding one's awareness beyond the limited moral spectrum of Peckham, governed by what Malkoff calls a "response to human beings as objects subordinate to other concerns,"43 to a greater reality of value and responsibility. There is a desperate seriousness with which Mrs. Spark invests Dougal's declaration that "Vision...is the first requisite of sanity." As he makes this avowal to Druce, Dougal becomes "a confessor in his box, leaning forward with his insidious advice through the grill," (72) insidious in the sense of apparent relevance cloaking serious intention. Dougal's counsel is extremely important, for without vision, madness and meaninglessness threaten. His statement is also an indirect answer to similar concerns expressed by Mrs. Spark in both The Comforters and Robinson. Caroline Rose had cried out, "Is the world a lunatic asylum then? Are we all courteous maniacs discreetly making allowances for everyone else's derangement?" (204) Likewise, Tom Wells had pointed out to January an "extremely serious" article in the magazine
Your Future "that will appeal to you....It's called "Are We Fulfilling the Prediction of the Apocalypse?" (63)
Through vision, one is able to glimpse a new order of reality, the search for which is echoed so seriously in the questions above. The form of that vision in Peckham Rye assumes variously a moral and an artistic dimension, but, unlike the first two novels, it conveys a Christian attitude only by subtle implication.

If Mrs. Spark has succeeded in offering the concrete notion of vision as a means to order, there is nonetheless a certain foreboding in the fact that the result of vision in Peckham Rye is usually either violently negative or ultimately ignored. A number of characters in the novel are recipients of Dougal's sage advice. Druce is given practical marital counsel; Merle Coverdale's "rotten life," (110) resulting in great part from her illicit relationship with Druce, is shown to be the effect of her free choice, a situation she can amend by refusing to see him any more; Miss Frierne is told that a simple act of decency and charity might have reunited her with her long lost brother; and Humphrey Place is advised not to marry the shrewish, miserly Dixie. The vision which Dougal offers to each promises peace, if not happiness. Yet its fulfillment entails a choice of moral responsibility, the surrender of adequacy and compromise to decency and resolution.

Faced by such demands, the people of Peckham Rye reject
the offer. Druce refuses to try to mend his marriage because his pride renders him incapable of taking the initial step toward reconciliation. Neither will he ask for a separation lest he lose his wife's money. He continues "living a lie." (74) Merle will not break off with Druce, she says, because "I've got to think of my pride. And there's the upkeep of my flat." (111) Money and position, both accorded her by Druce, she will not surrender. Her consequent murder at his hands, foreshadowed throughout the novel, flows directly from both of their refusals to act responsibly and morally in the light of their own consciences. Miss Frierne refuses to acknowledge even kinship with her dead brother, choosing rather to rationalize, "Well, there wasn't anything I could do if he's dead, was there?....Except pay for the funeral." (137) When Dougal answers her cold, brutal logic by imitating a corpse, thereby thrusting before her a frightening, concrete image of the result of her actions, she screams "with hysterical mirth," "You're callous, that's what you are...." (138) The quality of callousness, however, is misappropriated, as Miss Frierne fails to understand the vision of death which Dougal brings before her. She later collapses in a stroke, with no relatives to notify.

Humphrey Place is the most important character in the novel as far as reflecting the consequence of Dougal's proffered vision is concerned. The Ballad of Peckham Rye
takes as its starting point the fact that Humphrey left his bride at the altar and traces from that action, directly attributed to the influence of Dougal Douglas, the story of Dougal's effect on the community as a whole. Humphrey is the only one in the novel to follow Dougal's advice, and his refusal to marry Dixie assumes legendary proportions. In fact, Mrs. Spark tells us at the novel's conclusion, he eventually does return to marry Dixie. Though he would thus seem to reject Dougal's advice, Humphrey does not forfeit the insight of his vision. There is indeed serious doubt that Dixie will ever change her basically petty nature, but Humphrey still loves her and, unlike other lovers in the novel, he is willing to accept the responsibility of that love. The radiant happiness which usually accompanies a wedding is markedly absent from theirs. As they drive away, Dixie can only say, "I feel as if I've been twenty years married instead of two hours," a sentiment which Humphrey realizes is "a pity for a girl of eighteen." (159) No longer the naive lover, Humphrey has achieved a maturity of vision which, in the context of the novel, seems to deny the possibility of complete happiness.

Nevertheless, Peckham Rye does conclude with a glimpse by Humphrey of a greater and ideal reality:

But it was a sunny day for
November, and, as he drove
swiftly past the Rye, he saw
the children playing there
and the women coming home from
work with their shopping bags, 
the Rye for an instant looking 
like a cloud of green and gold, 
the people seeming to ride upon 
it, as you might say there was 
another world than this. (159-160)

The quality of this vision is in subtle contrast to that 
experienced by January Marlow at the conclusion of Robinson. 
Where she saw all things as immediately possible, Humphrey 
and the reader find them unlikely. The other world which 
flashes briefly before Humphrey's eyes is not elaborated 
upon. The reality which it represents, either an unattain-
able ideal or, what is more likely, a spiritual conscious-
ness which alone can give form and meaning to material 
reality, is only implied by the conspicuous absence of 
such ultimate, positive values in Peckham Rye. Negative 
qualities dominate society in the novel. Mrs. Spark is 
here concerned in detailing the realities of a fallen world 
that is fully experiencing the loss of innocence and the 
loss of all value beyond the range of physical measure. 
"What guilty wee consciences you've all got," (142) Dougal 
says in final summary of the collective character of Peckham 
Rye.

Wee as the consciences are, once they are enlightened 
by Dougal's presence as to the extent of their guilt, they 
usually lash out in violence to destroy either the supposed 
object of their guilt, just as Druce murders Merle, or the 
agent of their enlightenment. Dougal is driven away from
the community by Trevor Lomas and his gang of ruffians, and almost murdered. The violent hatred directed toward him is accelerated by the discovery of the notes which Dougal has assembled for the autobiography of Maria Cheese- man. Because they are mistakenly interpreted as evidence that Dougal is collaborating with the police, his life is put in jeopardy. Immediately obvious is the implication that, although he is not in the pay of the police, Dougal nevertheless represents a way of order that is in conflict with Peckham's basic modes of action and understanding. At the same time, as Malkoff indicates, his persecution by the community illustrates the theme of the "artist's traditional estrangement from society." It is in the light of these two considerations, order and art, that one is able to analyze the character of Dougal Douglas himself.

Even as Dougal comes to Peckham Rye from the outside, a stranger, so his true identity in the novel remains ambiguous. Suggestions abound as to his diabolical nature, particularly in regard to his humpback and the two bumps on his head which he claims are the remnants of horns. While he encourages such speculation about himself, Dougal explicitly tells Humphrey that he is not supposed to be the Devil, but "one of the wicked spirits that wander through the world for the ruin of souls." (87) Still another time, he looks "like an angel-devil." (34) Malkoff finally
concludes, "It is not easier to know whether he is angel or devil than to know whether he is Dougal Douglas or Douglas Dougal."45

Dougal's ambiguity persists, denying any real possibility of identification until it is understood that he functions only in relation to those with whom he comes into contact. Ann B. Dobie calls him "a supernatural being in human form," whose influence is "mainly negative,"46 while Samuel Hynes asserts that he is "a devil...[who] disrupts a working class community for the sheer deviltry of it...."47 Both of these classifications, however, fail to properly regard the question of ambiguity and so misinterpret Dougal's place and purpose in the novel. Mrs. Spark uses him as a figure of heightened reality come into the drab awareness of Peckham Rye. Dougal does not so much act on the consciousness of Peckham Rye as he does illumine it, bring before its eyes the warped and perverted vision that has become its own reality. Hence Dougal's great powers as a mime. Trevor Lomas dislikes him because he is able to do Trevor Lomas so well, with full display of surliness and petty affectation. The people of Peckham Rye act in recoil from the awareness which Dougal brings to their consciousness. As an exorcist, he claims the "ability to drive devils out of people," (114) but in truth he is only able to show the people the devils within themselves. The consequent re-
actions, violent and negative as they largely are in Peckham,
become the responsibility of the recipients of vision, not of Dougal. The few times that he does offer positive advice, as shown above, it proves to be not only wise but morally sound and correct.

Yet Dougal himself remains a moral enigma, unless he is meant to be an almost extreme embodiment of everything which Peckham Rye is not. Seemingly amoral, as Frank Baldanza complains, Dougal's liberties with women, the extent of which is never really specified, actually represent what Malkoff terms a sense of "freedom from the confines of artificial moralities." He too, however, is disturbed by the ambiguous nature of Dougal's "inability to tolerate sickness," which he sees as "evidence both of a limited sense of compassion and of a commitment to health and life." But surely it is the latter quality which must take precedence, given the total context of the novel. Blind to its own moral illness and stultified by its allegiance to Industry as a material deity, Peckham Rye exhibits a diseased way of life which Dougal can neither cure nor accommodate. Consequently, he must flee; and it is to Africa that Dougal peddles his vision, where, in the guise of a tape-recorder salesman, he seeks "in the undergrowth of the jungle" to prevent "the old tribal authority" from being "undermined by the mounting influence of modern scepticism." (158)

Dougal brings to Peckham Rye "a new 'morality,'" concludes Malkoff, "a new way of looking at the world" that
strips away the appearance of surface morals to discover a true order and a greater reality. One of the offices he claims for himself is that of "Investigator....It all comes under human research." (128) The function of investigator supplies Dougal with an authority similar to that of a public protector, and it is because they fear his connection with the legal authorities that the townspeople distrust him. The goal of Dougal's research, the revelation of a new order of reality, is thus certified by a certain air of legality, the first instance of a particular symbolic reference which Mrs. Spark will use in other novels to test the moral value of a given character or situation.

Though the discovery of Peckham's moral character is the end result of Dougal's ventures, the immediate purpose of his "human research" is the compilation of background material for Maria Cheeseman's autobiography. But Dougal is not a strict chronicler of events. As he explains to Miss Cheeseman, "I thought it was a work of art you wanted to write....If you only want to write a straight autobiography you should have got a straight ghost. I'm crooked." (85)

It is ultimately as an artist, we learn at the end of the book, that Dougal succeeds: "Thereafter, for economy's sake, he gathered together the scrap-ends of his profligate experience...and turned them into a lot of cock-eyed books, and went far in the world." (158-159)

As artist, Dougal brings to Peckham Rye a capacity for
wonder. "Fascinating," he says, "Everything is fascinating, to me, so far." (30) He researches into Peckham's past, there to discover such diverse and wonderful influences as John Ruskin, Mendelssohn, Boadicea, and a multi-talented mermaid, all vital elements of a rich and colorful past which contrasts sadly with the drab meanness of the present. (In Robinson, it will be recalled, there was similar contrast between the legendary aspects of the island and its present state of decay.) Dougal assembles this material together with his own experiences in Peckham to produce the autobiography which, while thoroughly distorting the appearance of reality, nevertheless reveals the truth. As Mrs. Spark has said, according to Malkoff, "It is the artist's job...to show us the truth, even if he must lie to do it." Even Maria Cheeseman, who had earlier complained that certain experiences recorded by Dougal had never really happened to her, praises the final result: "You've re-written my early years so beautifully...And now the whole book's perfect, and I'm thrilled." (369)

If the artist is successful in uncovering the truth in Peckham Rye, the quality of that vision is not consoling. The sense of decadence and unfulfillment suggested in Robinson is here carried to a more explicit and drastic awareness. The novel opens with a disrupted wedding and closes with a marriage overshadowed by unhappiness. Even Dougal, it is pointed out at the conclusion, never marries.
Murder, unsuccessfully attempted in Robinson, is here accomplished. The negative sterility of society in that novel gives way in Peckham Rye to a community that breeds corruption. And the waste land extends beyond Peckham Rye itself. The outer world into which Dougal flees is represented by a jungle and a spiritual community of monks which is on the verge of failure. Beneath the humorous antics of Dougal Douglas lies the frightening vision of a crumbling moral order in which the individual can retain only a qualified meaningful happiness, contingent upon the burden of responsibility.

The Comforters, Robinson, and The Ballad of Peckham Rye display the developing aspects of Mrs. Spark's moral vision and her attempts to formulate that awareness in a unified scheme. While The Comforters remains the most successful as an artistically integral whole, its deliberate ambiguity is nonetheless disturbing and its theme largely dependent on effect rather than content. Robinson has already been criticized for its cold schematic quality that reduces characterization to analysis. The Ballad of Peckham Rye, though it certainly avoids this latter mistake, still falls short of a unity of expression. The breach between the riotous character of Dougal Douglas and the serious dissection of Peckham Rye which he initiates is never fully bridged. Nevertheless the novel is highly entertaining and a definite success, insofar as it indicates the creative
imagination and depth of awareness which Mrs. Spark is able to bring to her work. What lies ahead is the fullest expression of that endeavor.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II

4. Memento Mori (1959), though it falls chronologically between Robinson (1958) and Peckham Rye (1960), will be treated in conjunction with The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961).
15. Hynes, p. 563.
23. Malkoff, Spark, pp. 11-12.
26. Ohmann, p. 76.
27. Malkoff, Spark, p. 16.
29. Ohmann, p. 81.
33. Malkoff, Spark, p. 16.
34. Hynes, p. 563.
35. Ohmann, pp. 80-81.
36. Malkoff, Spark, p. 16.
38. Hoyt, p. 137.
40. Malkoff, Spark, pp. 24-25.
44. Malkoff, Spark, p. 25.
45. Malkoff, Spark, p. 23.
47. Hynes, p. 563.
CHAPTER III

AGE AND YOUTH: Memento Mori and
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

Toward the beginning of Memento Mori, Jean Taylor, one of the more perceptive characters in this novel peopled almost exclusively by the aged, the infirm, and the dying, remarks that "Being over seventy is like being engaged in a war. All our friends are going or gone and we survive amongst the dead and dying as on a battlefield." The human condition in the face of death becomes the arena of sensibility in which Muriel Spark explores the truth and reality of a moral universe in both physical and spiritual contexts. Death becomes an abiding presence in the novel, reiterating through telephone calls to the elderly its simple message—"Remember you must die." (10) Death is the truth not to be denied, though it can be and sometimes is overlooked, usually with disastrous results. Dame Lettie Colston, herself an octogenarian, ascribes Taylor's somber appraisal of old age to the wanderings of senility and later, when bluntly told by her that the anonymous caller "is Death himself," officially registers her opinion with the ward sister at the nursing home where Taylor is confined that the poor woman is "off her head and should be watched." (179) Though Dame Lettie would dismiss death as the possible offender, she cannot put off his calling. Her brutal death is, in fact, a direct result of her refusal to recognize the
applicability of the phone calls to her own human condition, a realization that is as difficult for her as it is undesirable. Human frailty in face of the ultimate truth of age and death responds variously to the summons of memento mori with courage, fear, or disregard. Response and awareness become all important. The vision called for in Peckham Rye as the "requisite of sanity" is now sharply focused on the fact of death and discovers in that inescapable reality what Henry Mortimer, who along with Jean Taylor perceives the true function and identity of the telephone caller, proclaims as "nothing more than the truth...and a way of life." (154)

Physical comfort and happiness become at best only memories for the person of vision in Memento Mori. The novel operates on a stage dominated by decay and the struts and frets of the feeble. The world of possibility, embracing in its promise physical and emotional as well as spiritual fulfillment and manifested in progressively diminishing degrees in the first three novels discussed, now disintegrates in its offer of anything other than the spiritual. In sharp contrast to the glimpses of a joyful possibility evident in the conclusion of The Comforters, Robinson, and Peckham Rye, Memento Mori closes with a summary of the characters' illnesses and causes of death. Yet the novel does not subside in groans of gloom. It is, in fact, one of Mrs. Spark's most richly comic creations and, as Charles
Alva Hoyt remarks, demonstrates "the perfect wedding of her wit and irony with her sense of the fantastic." Such a blending of sensibilities is only consonant with Mrs. Spark's moral vision according to which death and old age offer not so much a cessation of life as a fulfillment. The extent of that fulfillment depends, however, on the range of awareness brought by each individual to the conclusion of his own earthly drama, while the irony resides in the inept attempts of most to postpone even facing the fact of a conclusion. It is the very earnestness and singleminded determination with which her aged creatures seek to avoid the truth of their own mortality that establishes the irony and conversely the pathos in this comedy of senescent manners.

Detachment is a word frequently used to describe Mrs. Spark's apparent attitudes toward her characters, and it is important to define that quality in order to appreciate the unique tone of the Sparkian humor which can treat such themes as old age and death without giving in to sentimentality and depression. Derek Stanford, for one, seems to find that humor annoying. Although admitting that she is "an ironist of uncommon parts," he quickly and matter-of-factly defines irony as, "of course, being a language in which an elite communicates with its inferiors while still preserving les covenances." He bolsters his own definition by discerning in her fiction an "unqualified assumption of superiority," an "arrogance which she wears as lightly as a grace," and
"an astringency: a curious avoidance of the genial, of anything that might promote an entente cordiale between author and reader." The source of this "uncertain need to insist," Stanford surmises, stems from the fact "that her world-picture is ours inverted." Her irony, and by implication her humor, he would seem to say, are directed mercilessly from the rock of her unflinching Faith upon those unfortunates unwilling or incapable of sharing her own religious vision.

Stanford is correct in assuming an initial world view which embraces her Faith as shaping Mrs. Spark's fiction but he is too extreme and arbitrary in thereby attributing moral snobbishness and indifference to her intent. Frank Kermode likewise perceives "a remoteness, a lack of ordinary compassion, in her dealings with characters," but hastens to point out that "this is part of the premise of her fiction; if we feel sorry in the wrong way, it's because our emotions are as messy and imprecise as life, part of the muddle she is sorting out." Her point of view, he continues, not only concerns itself with the truths inherent to her Catholic consciousness but also "the shapes assumed by these truths as perceived in the tumult of random events and felt upon insensitive fallen flesh." He concludes that it is the form and pattern which Mrs. Spark gives to these truths, and not their dogmatic relevance, which establishes both their universal appeal and validity.
For Samuel Hynes the detachment from her characters is "absolute," but her "Catholic...truly creative imagination" is also comic. He continues:

Compassion is there, but Mrs. Spark's religion protects her from that too easy compassion which we call sentimentality. She is neither cold nor softhearted; on the whole she is amiably disposed toward her characters, finds material for comedy in them, and records their nastier qualities without rancor....If she is detached in her attitude toward her characters, this is understandable in a novelist who sees people in terms of the designs into which they fit (including the design of the Four Last Things).

Mrs. Spark's novels are therefore grounded in a definite design and structure which measures the actions and machinations of her characters according to a moral norm. In Memento Mori that norm takes body from the various individual responses to the call of death. Comic in its depiction of the ludicrous preoccupations and self-centeredness of the elderly, the novel is nonetheless most serious in evoking a perspective from which that ludicrousness and the material concerns which spawn it are seen as pathetic and ineffectual. Mrs. Spark's choice of the three epigraphs which introduce Memento Mori helps, as Derek Stanford suggests, to clarify the tone of the novel. Yeats' "cry of the heart--the purely subjective experience of the grief and pain involved in being old," is followed by Traherne's eulogic vision of old age which, given the most un-angelic,
irreverent, and pointedly mortal nature of the novel's occupants, is clearly ironic. Finally, the Penny Catechism and its rigid exhortation "speaks for the religious imagination" which pervades the book.\(^7\)

If the novel does employ both pathos and irony in its portrayal of the foibles of old age--Mrs. Spark has said that the narrator "would be an old wise person who knew how these other old people really felt"\(^8\)--even more central to its theme is the earnest importance attached to the implacable demands of the Catechism injunction. Nor is the nature of that injunction necessarily limited to a specifically religious interpretation, as Mrs. Spark indicates through the philosophic humanism of Henry Mortimer. What it does entail is the awareness of a greater reality, in religious terms a supernatural order, which recognizes the role of death in human lives as a fulfilling function giving meaning and order to both past and future. At the same time, this discovery--grasped by too few in the novel--renders material interests petty in comparison, and therein again lies the irony. Yet awareness, on the other hand, does not so much imply promise in Memento Mori as it does stress suffering and hardship. Of the Four Last Things, Death receives sole focus in the novel, and even in the Catechism Heaven is mentioned last. Tension, not peace, seems to mark the struggle to conform one's life to the order of reality implied by death. The conclusion points out the somber
insistence of this concern, noting that "Jean Taylor lingered for a time, employing her pain to magnify the Lord, and meditating sometimes confidingly upon Death, the first of the Four Last Things to be ever remembered." (224)

But if the informing vision in the novel is Jean Taylor's, it is largely reinforced by the inadequacies of the other, more prevalent attitudes toward death which the novel delineates. In keeping with her growing awareness of a moral order in decay, Mrs. Spark concentrates on dissecting those qualities in human nature which have nurtured the disease and rendered impotent the message of Death. Like many other maxims which appear throughout the novel, the admonition of *memento mori* is generally lost upon the aged survivors on the battlefield of life. (Mrs. Spark remarks at the beginning of the second chapter on the inappropriateness of the term "Baker's Dozen" used by the nurses to describe the twelve grannies in the Maud Long Medical Ward: "thus it is that a good many old sayings lose their force." (15)) Percy Mannering, the poet, eagerly views the cremation of a former patron and later yearns for a sight of the ashes, seeking from the experience fresh grounds for poetic inspiration. Seeing death only as a theme, not a reality, Percy is unable to cope with his own telephone call except by incorporating its message into a poem, which he constantly reworks into various versions and revisions, apparently unable to find the proper expression. Just as his poetic
judgment is rendered dubious by his furious espousal of Ernest Dowson and equally furious rejection of Dylan Thomas, so is his attempt to counter death with art rendered imprecise and futile. As Mrs. Spark remarked earlier in the novel, "though he knew the general axiom that death was everyone's lot he could never realize the particular case." (22) When Mannering tells Guy Leet, the affable if somewhat cynical critic, about his mysterious phone call, Leet comments, "Intimations of immortality." (197) True as it is, however, the remark seems to be uttered only in jest or cynicism, since Guy Leet treats his own caller as a mischievous schoolboy, putting him off with "well now, sonny, I'm busy at the moment." (196) Cheerful despite the discomfort of numerous infirmities, Guy discerns the primitive quality of life in old age, "how simply the physical laws assert themselves, frustrating all one's purposes." (185) Yet he does not seem to perceive any type of reality beyond the ken of those same physical laws. A cultured wit and critic of the arts, he is unable or unwilling to cope with matters of moral concern. On safe and pleasant grounds while talking to Charmian Colston about the art of fiction, Guy is upset when he introduces "the question of life" into the conversation and Charmian counters with "the Providence of God." As Charmian enumerates her fears about having avoided responsibilities in her marriage, Guy thinks, "How banal and boring...do the most interesting people become
when they are touched by a little guilt." (192) Later pondering "what one's old age finally amounted to," he can really find no answer except in an "experience of calm and freedom," (193) largely resulting from the promise of wealth and material comfort stemming from what at the time appears to be a successful lawsuit. The frailty and limitation of that experience, however, is aptly demonstrated when, due to the discovery of a man who thinks he is God and is proved to be the beneficiary of the contested will, Guy loses everything.

Misappropriation of values is the keynote to the failure of vision in Memento Mori. Words lose their force and ring hollow as they are used by individuals unaware or forgetful of their true application. Mannerism again, having gnawed for some time on crusts of bread, finishes the meager tidbits with the choice remark, "Final perseverance is the doctrine that wins the eternal victory in small things as in great." (97) This from a man who cannot acknowledge a revival of interest in an aged novelist's works, "since he did not recognize the interim death." (98) Alec Warner, scientific recorder of the effects of senility on his acquaintances, dons his "High-Churchmanship" like spectacles to view with detachment the surprises of old age which he encounters in his studies. But the phrase remains merely "a figure of speech," originally applied to him "on account of the two occasions when he had darkened the doors
of a church, to observe, with awe and curiosity, a vicar... conducting the service of evensong all by himself in the empty building...." Alec's interest, however, is "directed exclusively towards the human specimen with his prayer book and splendid persistence in vital habits." (170) Pointedly, in the context of the empty church, man's spiritual interests are ignored and overlooked not only by Alec but by society at large. Later he admonishes Olive Mannering, his fledgling assistant in observing the actions of the aged: "You must watch, my dear, and pray. It is the only way to be a scholar, to watch and to pray." (95) Absolutely devoid of its original meaning, the Gospel dictum becomes on Warner's lips a tasteless, even noxious injunction to observe with reportorial eagerness the ravages of time on human specimens. Equally pitiable and shallow is the attempt by Eric Colston to justify a studied revenge on his father, who he feels "deserves a lesson," by attributing to "the moral point of view" (204) his desire to humiliate and ruin the old man. There is no moral point of view for the characters in Memento Mori until they realize the identity of the mysterious telephone caller and the urgency of his message. The awareness must be twofold: not only the reality of death itself but what the apprehension of that reality implies. The lack of definition which leads to their discomfiture is ironically and unsuspectingly summarized by one of their own group: "The question is...who's the fellow
that's trying to put the fear of God in us?" (155)

The call of death should come as a reminder of the structure and order of existence, according to which the Four Last Things become in Memento Mori all important and imminent. Yet the ancient protagonists, in their refusal to recognize the presence of that order, structure reality according to their own whims. Wills and last testaments play an important function in the novel, both in developing the twists and turns of the plot and in revealing the uncertainty and ultimate futility of trying to order one's life toward material ends. For wills go awry in the novel. Neither Dame Lettie, Granny Barnacle, Guy Leet, nor Lisa Brooke is able to control or predict the course and outcome of the wills which concern them. And while Mrs. Pettigrew, the most vicious and unscrupulous character in the novel, does finally succeed in gaining Lisa Brooke's money, her conquest is clearly ironic in the context of that moral order which the author envisions. The final glimpse of her at the hotel where she has gone to live after a first stroke, "jostling for a place by the door of the hotel lounge before the dinner gong sounds, underscores the pathetic shallowness of her life's goal. As Mrs. Spark slyly states, "Mrs. Pettigrew had her reward." (222)

In contrast to those who place their fragile trust in human wills, Jean Taylor commits herself to the Will
of God, "gain[ing] from this state of mind a decided and visible dignity, at the same time as she lost her stoical resistance to pain." (17) Jean Taylor's commitment and vision elucidate the moral order that lies with and beyond Death in Memento Mori. In that context, her awareness is indisputably religious, though not dogmatically Catholic, in its grasp of eternal values and realities. Mrs. Spark [as objective narrator herself (or "the old wise person" she has said "would be" the narrator)] gives authorial credence to such a reading by various comments throughout the novel. Thus it is remarked that Lisa Brooke, having apparently spent a lifetime in perversion and sensual pleasure, reformed her life at age 72, a year before her death, and "offered up the new idea, her celibacy, to the Lord to whom no gift whatsoever is unacceptable." (21) Similarly, when Granny Trotsky dies, the chapter concludes with the note that "her spirit returned to God who gave it." (53)

It is against Jean Taylor's ordering of experience in line with an abiding spiritual reality that the other characters' attempts to structure life and death according to meaningful principles are measured. The materialistic approach to experience is embodied particularly in Mrs. Pettigrew, Godfrey and Lettie Colston; the scientific in Alec Warner; the artistic in Charmian Colston; and finally the philosophical and humanistic in Inspector Mortimer. Death speaks to each in a different voice, a Protean
personality who mirrors his listeners' fears or realizations. As Mortimer tries to impress upon them all, "I think we must all realize that the offender is, in each case, whoever we think he is ourselves." (155)

To Lettie and Godfrey, the mysterious caller is sinister and uncivil. Godfrey—who leers impotently at a barely exposed garter for the sight of which he eagerly pays cash, who compulsively stuffs his pockets with tea-cakes and later wonders why, who contents himself by splitting matches with a razorblade in order to double the supply—reveals by the inconsequential and pathetic nature of his efforts the lack of content in the "comfort, the whole routine of his life," (78) to which he, huffing and puffing, subscribes. Just as he is unable to face the fact of death, Godfrey cannot even think of himself personally without the safe distance and detachment gained by using the impersonal term "one," a habit shared by Mrs. Pettigrew: "Why does one do these things? Godfrey wonders, never defining, however, exactly what things." (92) If defined, the feeble routine of his life would be too frightening in the emptiness of its discovery. Lettie too refuses to face the reality of her age. Writing to her nephew about his tenuous position in her will, she allows herself only the briefest intimation of her mortality:

...she glanced at the page she had just written. She thought, How shaky my writing looks! Immedi-
ately, as if slamming a door on it, she put the thought out of sight. (103)

But not out of time and fact, since despite and even because of all her efforts to protect herself from the caller, Dame Lettie unwittingly is the cause of her own brutal murder. The fear and desperation with which she listens to Death's call prompts her to seek help. "She had a longing for a strong friend, some major Strength from which to draw.... Whom, she thought, can I draw Strength from?" (105, 106) Mrs. Spark's use of capitals implies the spiritual answer to Lettie's pleas, but Lettie herself is unable to think in terms beyond the physical. The futility of her search stems from the fact that she never defines its reality, thereby rendering herself incapable of the awareness and consequent Recourse that is Jean Taylor's. The inability to face reality is carried to its furthest extreme by Mrs. Pettigrew who, with her "strong faculty for simply refusing to admit an unpleasant situation, and to go quite blank where it was concerned," (157) simply chooses to forget that she had ever received the call. She endures, it has been seen, but to what end?

Alec Warner, on the other hand, "contemplated Old Age" (60) and yet his awareness of reality--he concludes that the phone calls are a product of mass-hysteria--is as limited in many ways as that of the Colstons and Mrs. Pettigrew. Not a materialist by ordinary standards, Warner nevertheless
reduces experience to the scientific reality of the physical world. While the geriatrics are Jean Taylor's *memento mori*, they are to him merely cases for scientific observation. Even his friends become Warner's prey for study, and Mrs. Spark remarks how his eyes "feasted" (97) while watching one of them. A sociologist, he has spent years accumulating complicated files and cross-references, reducing his acquaintances to case histories on note cards. John Hazard Wildman describes him as "an ugly, basically repulsive person," and within the novel itself Jean Taylor rejects him as a lover because he is "too much masked...for any proper relationship with a grown woman." (69) Incapable of love and mindless of the sensibilities of others, Alec Warner is as cold and detached from life as the scientific study to which he has devoted himself. Ultimately as worthless and fragile as Godfrey's matches, his papers represent the attempt to reduce reality to the realm of the scientifically measurable, the physical. Kermode indicates how fitting it is that all the notes are finally destroyed in a fire, "like the dross they are," for though Warner "knows how death comes...it is Jean Taylor who knows what to do about it, its right place among the four last things." Viewing death only as another physical process, Warner tries to enlist Taylor's assistance: "I always like to know," he says, "whether a death is a good or bad one. Do keep a look out." To which she replies, "A good death...doesn't
reside in the dignity of bearing but in the disposition of the soul." (171) Karl Malkoff further illustrates the vulnerability of Warner's "intellectualization of experience:"

This scientific detachment provides a means of coming to terms with the human condition. But its impersonality eliminates fear at the cost of eliminating a good part of one's humanity.

After his loss, Warner remarks to Taylor that he feels as though he were "really dead." (222) His neat little structure gone, he feels himself undone. Yet once again Jean Taylor provides the proper perspective:

"We all appear to ourselves frustrated in our old age, Alec, because we cling to everything so much. But in reality we are still fulfilling our lives." (222)

One of the salient qualities of the novels previously discussed was Mrs. Spark's interest in the role of the artist's sensibility and awareness, by which the stuff of experience is rendered viable and true. In *Memento Mori* that concern remains undiminished though it does reflect a rather striking shift in outlook. For Charmian Colston, novelist, does not possess or acquire the vision of a Caroline Rose, a January Marlow, or the redoubtable Dougal Douglas. Nor is she even the central character as were the writers in the other novels. Art becomes in *Memento Mori* still another way of ordering experience and one which, at
least as practised by Charmian and Percy Mannering, is found wanting by itself. Not that Charmian herself is an unattractive or unsympathetic character. To the contrary, she readily elicits the sympathy of the reader and her ability as a novelist is attested to by the sudden revival of interest in her works. The recognition of her achievement quickens life itself, prompting her physician to comment on her "extraordinary powers of recovery, almost as if she had some secret source...." (81) It is as an artist that Charmian formulates experience: "...her novelist's mind by sheer habit still gave to those disjointed happenings a shape," certain facts in Alec Warner's life which she sees "as a dramatic sequence reaching its fingers into all his life's work." (59)

Malkoff goes so far as to identify Charmian with Muriel Spark's aesthetic side, citing Charmian's position that "The art of fiction is very like the practise of deception" as consonant with Mrs. Spark's own theory.¹² Like her, Charmian too is sometimes assailed for her lack of realism. She tells Guy Leet that halfway through her novels she "always got into a muddle," not knowing in what direction they were going until "The characters seemed to take on a life of their own." (191) (One cannot help but recall Caroline Rose's struggle with the typist and her insistent intruding upon the plot.) But Charmian's lack of realism, unlike her author's, seems to stem from a melodramatic romanticism.
Guy Leet remarks that no one without "charity" or "a period-sense" (190) can appreciate her books, and Dame Lettie, bemoaning Eric Colston's realism by implicit comparison to his mother's novels, urges him to adopt "a happier theme" and to "soar above the murk & smog & get into the clear crystal." (9) Though Mrs. Spark is clearly no Eric, her themes, as evidenced even in *Memento Mori*, increasingly probe the moral murk and smog of human nature. Thus the specific importance of Charmian's response to Death. Though she assures her caller that she has often thought of her death, Malkoff stresses the fact that she confuses his identity, assuming him to be another interviewer:

An artist, she has incorporated the call into the world of her obsession, and, though she confronts death, she distorts the encounter. Miss Spark is careful to show that Charmian's way of life, while better than most, is as imperfect as her attitude toward death.13

It is again in contrast to Jean Taylor, Mrs. Spark's "moral side,"14 as Malkoff calls her, that Charmian is found wanting. Extremely close throughout their relationship as mistress and maid, "When Charmian entered the Catholic Church Miss Taylor was received, really just to please Charmian." (46) Later, however, it is Miss Taylor who is the "religious woman" and Charmian "only a woman with a religion." (175) Just as she misconstrues the identity of her caller, Charmian avoids the realistic responsibilities
entailed by her Faith. Though she knows that she can and should release Godfrey from the clutches of Mrs. Pettigrew by confessing her own infidelities and her knowledge of his, "she did not possess the courage to do this." (162) When Taylor decides to break the disclosures to Godfrey, she tells Alec Warner that "it is necessary that Godfrey Colston should stop being morally afraid of Charmian...." "There is a time for loyalty," she continues, "and a time when loyalty comes to an end. Charmian should know that by now." (175) Though Charmian acknowledges that life is governed by "the Providence of God" and not by the artist's practice of deception, she does not carry the awareness over into her own life. It is a lie that governs her relationship with her husband, Malkoff concludes, a false structure which "reveals the flaw in Charmian's approach to experience: she has mixed art with life rather than carefully using one to shed light on the other; she has confused the power of the artist with the power of God."^15 The frailty of her system of values is subtly illustrated by the meticulous care and effort she spends in preparing an afternoon tea for herself, a feat no one later believes. The physical order, the unreliable nature of its comforts and accomplishments, is an uneasy peg on which to place one's hopes. Jean Taylor, on the other hand, having made "her suffering a voluntary affair" in accord with God's will, gains "a decided and visible dignity, at the same time as she lost her
stoical resistance to pain." (17) One need only recall Taylor's admonition to Alec Warner about true dignity residing not in the external, physical responses to death but in the disposition of the soul to understand why Mrs. Spark adds about Jean Taylor, in sharp contrast to Charmian's frail delicacy, "She complained more, called often for the bed pan, and did not hesitate, on one occasion when the nurse was dilatory, to wet the bed as the other grannies did so frequently." (17)

Other than Jean Taylor, Henry Mortimer, former Inspector of Police, is the only one to identify correctly the anonymous telephone caller, and his response, like Taylor's, is one of acceptance and understanding. His counsel having been sought by the other terrified recipients of the mysterious message, Mortimer, like Dougal Douglas who posed as an Inspector, reveals a truth to his listeners which they neither want nor accept. Mrs. Spark again links up the authority of vision with the authority of law, thereby ad- ducing a rightness in the terms of that vision. As Mortimer suggests:

"Death, when it approaches, ought not to take one by surprise. It should be part of the full expectancy of life. Without an ever-present sense of death life is insipid.

Now, one factor is constant in all your reports. The words, 'Remember you must die.' It is, you know, an excellent thing to remember this,
for it is nothing more than the truth. To remember one's death is, in short, a way of life."
(153-154)

Malkoff feels that "Mortimer's point of view, not necessarily religious but compatible with religion...informs the entire novel." In his insistence on the awareness of death and time in "defining life, giving it significance," Mortimer expresses "the existential perspective:

"To live without awareness of death is to live in bad faith, in deception, to deprive oneself of the only opportunity to rescue existence from absurdity, to forge being in the place of nonbeing."16 Mortimer clearly represents an attempt by Mrs. Spark to formulate the moral vision which structures Memento Mori along lines other than those imposed by her own religion. George Green speaks of Mrs. Spark employing her "powers, not as a support for a theology, but rather as another means, fraternal but autonomous, of exploring a world which is most of all dynamic, open, a world which invites numerous modes of untying its knots."17 Henry Mortimer, who discovers in death a creative and governing principle for life, does enunciate a philosophical approach to that final physical experience which does not necessarily (Malkoff's distinction) enjoin a religious view. Just how much that philosophical stance can be validated by itself in the novel is, however, a matter of some doubt. The attractiveness of Mortimer himself as well as his outlook
recalls the similar function of Mrs. Jepp in *The Comforters*. That grand old lady operated "on the level of nature,"¹⁸ according to George Greene, and provided a pleasant, comic foil to Caroline Rose's authoritative Catholicism. Similarly, Mortimer attempts to express a moral order minus the necessity of a religious awareness. But he is finally unable to separate the two, even as Mrs. Jepp ultimately denied that she was not religious. Upon being commended by one of his listeners for a "religious point of view...too easily forgotten these days," Mortimer tries unsuccessfully to clarify his intentions: "Perhaps 'resigning ourselves to death' doesn't quite convey what I mean. But of course, I don't attempt to express a specifically religious point of view." The rejoinder, however, is as insistent and final: "You sound most religious to me." (153)

The truth envisioned by Mortimer cannot be sustained without an accompanying awareness of that greater reality which supports it and which is defined by the Four Last Things. It is a spiritual awareness of the depth and extension of reality beyond the intimation of death which informs *Memento Mori*. For Jean Taylor, like Caroline Rose, the Catholic faith becomes a means to awareness of the mysterious workings of a moral order and the responsibilities it entails. Thus she can perceive Mrs. Pettigrew's reward in all its irony, Charmian's failure as a wife, and the identity of the mysterious caller. It is while she is
at Mass that Taylor, like Caroline Rose, first suspects the true nature of the invisible forces around her: realizes, that is, the complex nature of reality. Vision again is Mrs. Spark's theme; its object the dual nature of reality—spiritual and physical—and the place of death as a very real and participating facet of that awareness. It is a Catholic consciousness which gives form and expression to that reality, not by theological definition but by a comprehending expansiveness. Mrs. Spark's concern is not Catholic dogma, but the moral nature of man. Her purpose is not to proselytize but to expose, to reveal the various constructs by which man seeks to order experience and fails. The moral order alone endures, relying on the necessity of vision and awareness. The Catholic awareness which governs Memento Mori is no more nor less than the realization of a higher plane of reality than the physical order. As defined by the very general statement of the Four Last Things, the novel certainly avoids the charge of Catholic indoctrination. And even if one objects to a spiritual consciousness of any kind, regardless of how general, the novel's "dispassionate calm," as Greene suggests, "accounts for why so many readers who are not religious in their orientation grant the authority of what she says."

While The Comforters and Robinson seemed to end on a note of promise or at least wonder consistent with the range of vision the heroines achieved in large part from their
Faith, Memento Mori is strikingly spare and austere in its presentation of the effects of awareness on the individual. Apparently lost is the hope for any kind of fulfillment in the physical order outside of death. Jean Taylor's sole recourse at the end of the novel seems to be the enduring of pain as an act of union with the will of God and her "meditating sometimes confidingly"--the wording is notably ambiguous--"upon Death." (224) Malkoff even suggests that Taylor "is perhaps too ready not simply to have death in mind but to exclude life," a claim he supports by citing Taylor's earlier remark to Alec Warner that graveyards bear the proof of people's existence. It is not, however, that life on the physical order is rejected in favor of a spiritual afterlife, the existence of which is at best only implied in the novel. Rather life is seen to be defined by death and therefore to be endured. When Taylor comments that the constant discovery of new drugs to prolong life makes her fear that death will never come, Dame Lettie is made so uneasy that she is forced to continue "obligingly: 'Of course the principle of keeping people alive is always a good one.'" (176) In the same context, Malkoff also sees Taylor's actions in regard to Charmian, regardless of motive, as constituting a "betrayal," and this, together with her obsession for death, renders her position of authority in the novel questionable. (The same question will be central to Jean Brodie and there arouse even more critical debate.)
What he fails to take into account is that Taylor acts in a manner extremely consistent with the point of view which pervades the book. Death is the primary fact in the novel; the person of vision perceives this and acts according to his awareness of the moral order as sustained by the dual nature of reality; that order is one of demands and commitments. Taylor reveals the secrets of Charmian's past not to injure her but to save Godfrey. She must betray friendship because Charmian has betrayed responsibility. Courage is the necessity she learns and Charmian dismisses, and the instrument of that awareness is her religion. As one of the grannies complains to her about the rigid requirements of the Catholic faith, "It's a hard religion, Granny Taylor." (50)

A preoccupation seen as germinal in The Comforters and ripening in Robinson—the impossibility of a rewarding physical happiness in accord with the demands of a spiritual reality—achieves fruition in Memento Mori. Physical decay is the distinguishing feature of the physical order in Memento Mori. The novel even concludes with a litany of the illnesses and causes of death which claim most of the characters. Comparison has already been made between Memento Mori and The Comforters, showing the similar foundations in each of that heightened awareness Mrs. Spark deems essential, but another look at the differences between the two reveals how much the joy natural to vision in her first
novel has given way to a sober implacability in the present. The youthful energy of Caroline Rose yields to the musings of old age. Henry Mortimer, whose counterpart in The Comforters was the eternal Mrs. Jepp--she alone exists in the present tense at the novel's conclusion--dies of a heart attack while boarding his yacht, which he had longed so desperately to sail and "for which, in his retirement, he had sacrificed a car." (156) Death, which speaks to Mortimer over the phone as a woman, "gentle-spoken and respectful," (156) nevertheless frustrates the dream of his old age, cancelling any fulfillment other than itself. Finally, Mrs. Pettigrew, true sister in villainy to Georgina Hogg who was properly disposed of in The Comforters, survives in style at the close of Memento Mori.

Accompanying the physical deterioration which outlines the novel is a sense of moral decay at work in society. Blackmail, homosexuality, bigamy and murder are minor themes which underlie the basic failure of human relationships. Sex in the novel is generally sterile, perverse, or illicit. Alec Warner's cold, scientific detachment renders him incapable of any kind of meaningful relationship, sexual or otherwise, while Godfrey Colston is reduced by his impotency to paid glimpses at a garter. Eric Colston and Lisa Brooke indulge in homosexuality, whether by nature or by whim it is not clear. A bigamous marriage lies at the root of the legal battle which involves a good number of the characters.
Marriage itself, an important theme in Mrs. Spark's novels, is, with one exception, a social veneer masking infidelities and extraneous motives. Godfrey and Charmian's relationship is one of deceit, jealousy, and "moral blackmail." 23 Guy Leet marries Lisa Brooke only to silence her in regard to his own affair with Charmian. The marriage is never consummated, and there is some question whether that between wealthy Ronald Sidebottome, 79, and Olive Mannering, 24, ever could be. It is hinted that Olive—"She knows what she's doing all right." (167)—has something other than love in mind. The remark is made by Mrs. Pettigrew who, though she otherwise might not be the best authority by which to judge motives, understands Olive, Mrs. Spark suggests, "As heart is said to speak unto heart." (167) Moreover, Ronald is conveniently in ill health and, at the novel's conclusion, "is allowed up in the afternoons but is not expected to last another winter." (223) The only sound marriage, based on sincerity and love, is that of Emmeline and Henry Mortimer, but at the novel's conclusion it too is dissolved by Henry's death.

_Memento Mori_ is a portrait of diseased humanity, doomed in the physical order to unhappiness, age, and death even as it flounders in the moral order on the brink of a yawning abyss. Though the novel can be read as a "Swiftian vision of the world," 24 one depicting the modern Struldburghs converting experience into nothing more than "an intensification
of human folly," such a view does not sufficiently account for the pervasive inevitability of human misery and evil in the novel. It is tempting to read Mrs. Spark's depiction of Mortimer's grandchild near the end of the novel as vindicating the eternal cycle of rebirth and human endurance and introducing a note of promise in the physical order itself, until one realizes that the quality of infancy stressed throughout the novel is not innocence but helplessness. The geriatrics in Taylor's ward are confined to beds "with railed sides like children's cots," and one of them sets up "an infant-like wail, yet not entirely that of a child--it was more like that of an old woman copying the cry of an infant."

(118) Innocence is no more, nor is the wonder it projects. The cry, like Yeats's, might well be directed at its loss. Mrs. Bean, "her skin stretched thin and white over her bones, her huge eye-sockets and eyes in a fixed infant-like stare," (173) combines characteristics of the skeleton and the child and, with her sex nearly indeterminate because of age, seems to exist as a composite portrait of human life, beginning and end. While the characters frequently exhibit the manners and foolishness of children, prompting Hoyt to analyze the novel in terms of the proverb "'Old men will become babes again,'" the reverse is also true. The babes will grow old in a world very similar to Matthew Arnold's "darkling plain" and, even more surely, they will die.

It is an Augustinian view of the world which is at the
core of *Memento Mori*. Human nature is governed by the fact of Original Sin and the undeniable presence of evil. The discovery is one which comes to Charmian on the verge of adulthood, negating the illusion of innocence which is the dream of youth:

She had been quite eighteen years of age before she had realized that everyone did not love each other; this was a fact which she had always found it difficult to convey to others. "But surely, Charmian, you must have come across spitefulness and hatred before you were eighteen?"

"Only in retrospect," she would reply, "did I discern discord in people's actions. At the time, all seemed harmony. Everyone loved each other."

Some said she was colouring the past with the rosy glow of nostalgia. But she plainly remembered her shock when, at the age of eighteen, she became conscious of evil—a trifling occasion; her sister had said something detrimental about her—but it was only then that Charmian discovered the reality of words like "sin" and "calumny" which she had known, as words, for as long as she could remember. (187-188)

In her old age at the nursing home, Charmian nevertheless makes the mistake of feeling "almost free from Original Sin." Though she quickly states, "It's an illusion, of course," (188) her failure to act responsibly, that is with courage, in regard to Godfrey and Mrs. Pettigrew, reflects an attempt to sustain that illusion, to enjoy peace without commitment. Evil itself is the outcropping of human nature in revolt against the imposition of a moral order, but its
effects often seem random and arbitrary to the consciousness which grasps such events according to those values ordained by the physical order alone. Mrs. Pettigrew the villain enjoys material success. Dame Lettie is murdered precisely because she is so afraid of death. Godfrey, a notoriously bad driver, dies from complications stemming from an automobile accident which he probably caused. "It was the couple in the other car," Mrs. Spark observes, "who were killed outright." (223)

While the irony is obvious in each case, what is particularly unsettling about Lettie's death is its unwarranted violence and about Godfrey's its disastrous consequences for others. "Everything is in the Providence of God," (192) Charmian had declared, but her observation does little to alleviate the uncertainty and uneasiness about which direction Providence will take. Perhaps the choicest and most frightening irony of the novel is concentrated in the character of Matt O'Brien who thinks he is God, who proclaims "I recollect all creatures," (216) and who is insane.

In this, her third novel, which Malkoff praises as "remarkable" for the range of its characterization and "impressive" because she "is able for the first time to temper the needs of her techniques to the work as a whole," Muriel Spark begins to clarify the dimensions and terrain of her moral vision in line with an increasingly sober awareness of the demands of reality and the disparity of
interests at work on its two levels of being. Matthew Arnold saw in "Dover Beach" a world from which Faith receded like a wave and which, though it seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.**

The world of Memento Mori is similar, except that here there is certitude. It lies in Death and beyond, in the certainty of the Four Last Things.

** **

Two novels—The Ballad of Peckham Rye and The Bachelors—intervene chronologically between the publication of Memento Mori and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. In the latter work, however, Muriel Spark returns to themes initially conceived in her portrait of old age and a declining moral and physical order to depict a world of prelapsarian innocence and youth, to explore its exuberant vitality, and to relate its passing. Charles Alva Hoyt sees the "idea" for The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie taking root from a recurring phrase in Memento Mori: "laid to rest in their prime," (18) "they were both past their prime," (72) "nearing the end of your prime." (104-105)** Time is, in a sense, very much the subject of both novels, the first stressing its inevitability and the second its ambiguous opportunity. (Sandy Stranger has to remind herself "that her schooldays were supposed to be the happiest days of her life." (37) In
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, as Malkoff illustrates, temporal perspective becomes an intricate part of Mrs. Spark's artistic technique, the continual shifts in time reflecting her interest not in a chronological order of "causal sequence" but in a "moral order" of "evaluation sub specie aeternitatis." In this disarming novel about a charming schoolteacher and her young charges, the discovery is of "the dark moral heart of man." Reality is the same as in Memento Mori, only glimpsed from a different perspective. Experience yields the same result for Charmian Colston and Sandy Stranger: the loss of innocence. Death does not speak over telephones, but it does claim its victims. Evil does not lurk under grotesque forms of age; it is embodied in one of Mrs. Spark's most attractive and yet frightening characters, Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.

A teacher at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, Jean Brodie cultivates her own special group of students, the Brodie set, each of whom displays a certain native ability for which she becomes famous: Monica Douglas for mathematics, Rose Stanley for sex, Eunice Gardiner for swimming and gymnastics; Jenny Gray for her gracefulness and beauty; Mary McGregor for "being a silent lump whom everybody could blame" (13) and Sandy Stranger, "merely notorious for her small, almost nonexistent eyes, but...famous for her vowel sounds...." (12) Apart from these characteristics which, except in the case of Sandy Stranger, are used primarily as
comic and individuating devices, the Brodie girls are known for their exceptional dedication and loyalty to their leader. More than this, Sandy realizes while still quite young, they are "Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along." (47-48) The clarification of this realization, together with its very real implications and very disastrous results, later causes Sandy to betray Miss Brodie to the headmistress so that she is dismissed from her position. It is not the fact of Sandy's betrayal but her reason for doing so that structures the plot of the novel, just as it is the growth of her awareness of Miss Brodie's world that informs the theme.

Two of the most complexly ambiguous characters in Mrs. Spark's repertoire, Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger defy a pinpoint classification as villain and heroine though it is "their relationship, gradually quickening into a duel," Hoyt argues, "that makes the book go."\(^{33}\) On the one hand, Jean Brodie captivates the reader, just as she captivates her girls and her two lovers, Gordon Lowther and Teddy Lloyd, with her indomitable individualism, her social and aesthetic grace, and her brimming vitality. Tantamount to a confession of his passion for her, Teddy Lloyd sums up for his wife the irresistible qualities of Jean Brodie:

Deirdre laughed. "Miss Brodie sounds a bit queer, I must say. What age is she?"
"Jean Brodie," said Teddy, "is a magnificent woman in her prime." He got up, tossing back his lock of hair, and left the room. (152)

At the same time, she is a willful, destructive monomaniac who imposes without any question or hesitation her order of thought, appreciation, and morality upon those entrusted to her care and, in almost every case, this sense of personal intuition proves dangerous and sometimes fatal. She rejects a sexual relationship with the man she loves, Teddy Lloyd, because he is married, a not ignoble gesture on her part; but she then enters into an affair with another, Gordon Lowther, merely to work off her frustrations and because an affair with a bachelor is "more becoming." Certainly not beyond sympathy and understanding as Miss Brodie tells it, nevertheless, as Sandy realizes, "it was not the whole story." (88) Miss Brodie's sexual frustrations lead to moral horror as she grooms one of her students to take her place in Teddy Lloyd's bed and another to fill her in with details of the relationship's progress. Finally, her political obsessions--she is an ardent admirer of Hitler and Mussolini--are vicariously fulfilled by sending a "dark, rather mad girl," (172) passionately devoted to her and only seventeen years old, to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Miss Brodie's reaction to her consequent death on a train under attack, marked only by a sense of her own accomplishment and a passing regret that the young girl might have
served her needs in regard to Teddy Lloyd, completes the portrait of the moral monster she has become:

"...sometimes I regretted urging young Joyce Emily to go to Spain to fight for Franco, she would have done admirably for him, a girl of instinct, a---"

"Did she go to fight for Franco?"

said Sandy.

"That was the intention. I made her see sense. However, she didn't have the chance to fight at all, poor girl." (181)

Jean Brodie's transformation from a woman of charm and refined sensibility to one of enormously destructive capabilities is subtle but real. That the change is not so much a drastic metamorphosis as it is a progressive development of her natural character is made quite clear by the author's insistence that "there was nothing outwardly odd about Miss Brodie. Inwardly was a different matter, and it remained to be seen, towards what extremities her nature worked her."

(64) In some ways, the novel traces, like the progress of a disease, the moral abscess which corrupts her, metastasizing into "the principles governing the end of her prime [which] would have astonished herself at the beginning of it."

(64) (She finally dies from "an internal growth." (83)) Nor can the reader in any way absolve Miss Brodie by reason of her eccentricities and personal frustrations, inferring therefrom that perhaps she might not be held accountable for her actions. As Mrs. Spark states, "It is not to be supposed that Miss Brodie was unique at this point of her
prime, or that (since such things are relative) she was in any way off her head," (62) a point further clarified by Eunice Gardiner in response to her husband's assertion that her "upbringing was a bit peculiar."

"But she wasn't mad. She was as sane as anything. She knew exactly what she was doing." (41)

Insanity denies responsibility, but Mrs. Spark stresses Jean Brodie's conscious efforts even as she reveals her moral weakness. Miss Brodie is so much in control that she is even able to use the mental instability of one of her students, Joyce Emily, to accomplish her own purposes. This is one of those extremities toward which her nature works, a sense of all-encompassing self-responsibility which is, by antithesis, so dangerously irresponsible in its results. "Give me a girl at an impressionable age," Miss Brodie cries, "and she is mine for life." (16) The order of thought, preference, and judgment which she imposes upon her students denies any authority or basis other than that which she creates of herself or of which she approves. At first, her relegation of values seems refreshingly sincere and convincing, as when she deprecates for her students' benefit the slogan "Safety First" pinned on the wall of the headmistress's study. "But Safety does not come first," she argues, "Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first. Follow me." (17) An enriching proposition, as is her declaration "Where there is no vision... the people perish," (13) but again this is not the whole
story. Both of these statements are recorded in the first chapter of the novel, Mrs. Spark creating for the reader much the same delight and wonder at the marvelous Miss Brodie as experienced by the ten-year-old girls just given into her charge. As the novel progresses, however, and one sees through Sandy's eyes the peculiar qualifications which the terms "Goodness" and "Truth" acquire in the Brodie context, their value and appeal grow more and more questionable. Thus Sandy's urge to be kind to Mary McGregor, whom Miss Brodie always criticizes as being stupid and to blame, is arrested by the "sound of Miss Brodie's presence." (45) Her impulse to join the Brownies, an organization scorned by Miss Brodie in comparison to Mussolini's marching corps, is stifled by the "group-fright" (48) which causes her to perceive herself and the other girls, "all in a frightening little moment, in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose." (46) Truth exists only as a relative thing to Miss Brodie, a fact Sandy first becomes aware of in relation to the tales of her early love-life which Miss Brodie relates to the students. Her "method of making patterns with facts," (106) structuring her early romance with details of her present love, indicates a redefinition of reality that is basically a distortion of the truth. Ultimately she begins to impose this perverted reality directly upon Rose and Sandy, trying to draw them into direct participa-
tion in her vicarious love-life. To do so, she must restructure the moral order itself to suit her requirements. Accordingly, Rose, who is to take her place physically in Lloyd's affections, is deemed to be "above the common moral code, it does not apply to her," (160) while Sandy, due to her obvious perception, is conceded knowledge of the "fact which it is not expedient for anyone to hear about who is not endowed with insight." (160-161) The truth and goodness offered by Miss Brodie as the initial elements of a proper order are so warped by her commanding presence that they reflect not beauty but an ugly parody of ideals and morality. The vision earlier proclaimed by her negates its own premise, for Joyce Emily glimpses it and perishes. A vision governed by relative values, according to which Miss Brodie "and her actions were outside the context of right and wrong," (126) it corrupts and destroys those drawn too closely into its dreadfully real fantasy. It is "a creeping vision of disorder" (126) from which Sandy can only retreat into a convent, there to seek a new reality as Sister Helena of the Transfiguration.

When Sandy first begins to apprehend Miss Brodie's plans in regard to Rose and herself, the idea has about it "a whiff of sulphur." (160) Ann B. Dobie uses this phrase to identify Miss Brodie as

one of Muriel Spark's demons: forces, sometimes in human form and sometimes not, which exist simply to disrupt the
ordinary and habitual, to confuse the traditional and acceptable, to blend the commonplace and the supernatural so that a person is forced to redefine himself in the context of an environment, or reality, filled with more possibilities than he had heretofore imagined. Their purpose is not to destroy or harm, though sometimes they do so....their purpose is to "trans-figure the commonplace."  

It is impossible not to compare Miss Brodie with that other proponent of vision, Dougal Douglas, as Dobie does, but it is equally important to note the distinction between the two. Dougal offers a vision that can save; Miss Brodie imposes one that destroys. While Dobie demonstrates a fine insight into Mrs. Spark's theme and her rejection of extraneous supernatural forces in favor of a supernatural reality that "is no longer found outside the individual but within man himself," she, like many other critics, is bewitched in her consideration of Miss Brodie by the statement rather than the quality of the vision she offers. Although Dobie is certainly aware of Miss Brodie's flaws, nonetheless she obliquely condones them. For instance, she seems to appreciate Miss Brodie's habit of presenting history to her students through her own limited personal experiences and the fantasies of her love-life, thereby "urging them to define themselves not only in terms of the ordinary world but also in terms of the romance which accompanies it."  

The concept is pleasant but unrealistic, in every Sparkian connotation of the word. It is precisely
because she is "a romantic idealist, of the authoritarian kind," Samuel Hynes asserts, that she is so dangerous. 37

The vision she presents is not true, not right. As Sandy complains to one of her companions, "She's not supposed to give us freedom, she's supposed to give us lessons." (38)

Consequently, the science teacher, polar opposite to Miss Brodie, assumes her "rightful place" in the classroom and exercises her "mysterious priesthood" while Sandy is "en-thralled...by the lawful glamour of everything there." (38, 134, my italics) Less outwardly diabolical than the ambiguous Dougal Douglas, Jean Brodie nevertheless represents a very real evil that does not so much transfigure as it does distort the commonplace. Hers is ultimately a corrupting force that literally takes upon itself the reappraisal of good and evil at the risk of the destruction of innocence.

Mrs. Spark suggests affinities between her and the primal seducer of Eden:

"I have four pounds of rosy apples in my desk, a gift from Mr. Lowther's orchard, let us eat them now while the coast is clear--not but what the apples do not come under my own jurisdiction, but discretion is...discretion...Sandy?"

"The better part of valour, Miss Brodie." Her little eyes looked at Miss Brodie in a slightly smaller way. (70)

The comparison is not too farfetched in light of the "creeping vision of disorder" she disseminates, suggestive of the Snake, an analogy which Mrs. Spark uses in The Bachelors.
immediately preceding Jean Brodie, to the same effect.

At the same time, it is an unconscious evil which moves Jean Brodie and paradoxically preserves her own innocence as it destroys that of others. For she never doubts herself or her causes, her only concession after the war being that "Hitler was rather naughty." (179) Still safely entrenched in her own world of self-constructed values and ideals, she can ponder after her dismissal only the identity of the one who betrayed her, this despite Sandy's insistence that "If you did not betray us it is impossible that you could have been betrayed by us....The word betrayed does not apply." (185) Rooted in "a warped and egocentric predestinarianism," writes Hynes, the authority wielded by her arises from the delusion of her own personal destiny according to which she plays at Providence and fails. 38 She is a product of Edinburgh, an "inverted expression" of its Calvinistic spirit, 39 and thus remains undaunted in her conviction of the role she has assigned herself:

She was not in any doubt, she let everyone know she was in no doubt, that God was on her side whatever her course, and so she experienced no difficulty or sense of hypocrisy in worship while at the same time she went to bed with the singing master. Just as an excessive sense of guilt can drive people to excessive action, so was Miss Brodie driven to it by an excessive lack of guilt. (126)

This is the objective statement of the author, but the same
understanding of Miss Brodie's character is reached by Sandy: "She thinks she is Providence...she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end." (176) Sandy is the individual with insight in the novel. Miss Brodie herself grasps this fact quite early and though she, like most of Sandy's critics, is occasionally annoyed by her squinting, ever-peering eyes--"Sandy, I'll swear you are short-sighted, the way you peer at people"--it is those eyes which discern the truth about reality and Miss Brodie. She quite correctly answers the above complaint, "I'm not....it only seems so." (157) When Sandy finally realizes that Miss Brodie's fantasies have actually initiated destructive realities, she moves quickly and vigorously to put a stop to her. Her judgment in doing so seems seconded by the author, but the utter condemnation of Miss Brodie is by no means the final judgment of either. For Sandy alone, of all the Brodie set, seems to have felt the influence of her teacher through the rest of her life, nor is it a totally debilitating influence she experiences: "...she could look back and recognize that Miss Brodie's defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects...." (126) Later, as author of an "odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception, called 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace,'" (52-53) she is often questioned about childhood influences, to which she invariably replies, "There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime." (187)
What redeems Jean Brodie from the charge of consummate villainy and, in a sense, even endears her is an exaggerated idealism of the kind that, after and despite the war, can be "quite sure the new regime would save the world." (179) Sandy later says that Miss Brodie provided "something to react against." (52) As much the cause of her downfall as her unparalleled sense of self-rightness is her refusal to face reality. Her political ideals, for instance, are so generalized as to become false abstractions. Faced with the concrete presence of the ravages of unemployment in Edinburgh, she dismisses it from her mind by recourse to Mussolini's Italy where, she tells her students, "the Unemployment problem has been solved." (59) Sandy is later bored by Miss Brodie's prattle about new regimes and new orders because "it did not seem necessary that the world should be saved, only that the poor people in the streets and slums of Edinburgh should be relieved." (179) Jean Brodie is basically a product of her environment; "in many ways," Mrs. Spark says, "an Edinburgh spinster of the deepest dye." (40) Her youthful love having been destroyed in the previous war, she is like "legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties, women from the thirty and upward, who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices in art or social welfare, education or religion." (62) Dreamers and idealists, they took to their activities to fill the gaping losses in their own
lives. Unlike the others, however, Miss Brodie is "a trifle out of place" (63) because, as a teacher, she is placed in a position of authority where she can impose those unreal dreams bred of frustration on others, "putting old heads," she tells her pupils, "on your young shoulders." (15) An awareness of the pitiful as well as dangerous side to this undertaking grows on Sandy as she begins "to sense what went to the making of Miss Brodie who had elected herself to grace in so particular a way and with more exotic suicidal enchantment than if she had simply taken to drink like other spinsters who couldn't stand it any more." (160) The dreams are false, the authority is false, and together they breed a destructive evil. Still there remains about Miss Brodie an aura of innocence which, while not detracting from the culpability of her actions, nevertheless alleviates somewhat the guilt of her intentions. For there is a certain excitement and delight about Miss Brodie as dreamer and her confidence in a reality of her own making, a wonder, akin to regret, that accompanies the failure of all such impossible dreams and those who create them. It is a beauty born of frailty, Sandy realizes, and she

felt warmly towards Miss Brodie at these times when she saw how she was misled in her idea of Rose. It was then that Miss Brodie looked beautiful and fragile....In the same way Miss Brodie's masterful features became clear and sweet to Sandy when viewed in the curious light of the woman's folly, and she never felt more
affection for her in her later years than when she thought upon Miss Brodie silly. (162-163)

Jean Brodie may dominate the action, but the novel really belongs to Sandy Stranger. It is the story of her development, her growth from child to woman and from innocence to experience. Unlike Miss Brodie, who never changes, remaining from first to last the romantic idealist and therefore delusionist, Sandy moves beyond instinct and insight, her primary qualities, into mature vision, that quality of awareness which for Mrs. Spark apprehends the true nature of reality and responds accordingly. Yet it is indicative of the complex ambiguity which governs this particular novel, and as importantly Mrs. Spark's evolving concept of vision, that Sandy is treated quite harshly by the author and her actions almost unanimously distrusted by the critics. Throughout the novel Mrs. Spark emphasizes "her tiny eyes which it was astonishing that anyone could trust," (147) and when Sandy confronts Teddy Lloyd about his obsession with Jean Brodie, she gives him "her insolent blackmailing stare." (178) Malkoff is perhaps her most condemning critic, viewing Sandy as a moral blackmailer in the same league as the villains of the previous novels. He even suggests that her denunciation of Miss Brodie may stem from sexual motives. Despite all her efforts, Sandy, who has become Teddy Lloyd's lover, is unable to make him forget Jean Brodie.
Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Sandy's characterization, however, and the one most generally remarked upon, concerns her behavior as Sister Helena, long after the betrayal of Miss Brodie. As described by the author, Malkoff hastens to point out, she "is anything but the picture of a soul at peace." Mrs. Spark writes:

She clutched the bars of the grille as if she wanted to escape from the dim parlour beyond, for she was not composed like the other nuns who sat, when they received their rare visitors, well back in the darkness with folded hands. But Sandy always leaned forward and peered, clutching the bars with both hands, and the other sisters remarked it and said that Sister Helena had too much to bear from the world since she had published her psychological book which was so unexpectedly famed. (52)

Malkoff's distaste for Sandy stems from the same suspicions he evinced in regard to Jean Taylor: whether their actions signify an affirmation of principle or simply a rejection of, withdrawal from, life. Sandy is apparently the only one of the Brodie set to experience a lasting influence from her teacher. To the others Miss Brodie simply becomes a memory. Mary McGregor, for instance, recalling "that the first years with Miss Brodie, sitting listening to all those stories and opinions which had nothing to do with the ordinary world, had been the happiest time of her life....thought this briefly, and never again referred her mind to Miss Brodie...." (24)

Rose Stanley, a central character in the drama Miss Brodie
tries to create, "shook off Miss Brodie's influence as a dog shakes pond-water from its coat." (174) Only Sandy, who betrays her, seems to fulfill Miss Brodie's earlier promise and becomes hers for life. In fact, pupil emulates teacher to the extent that she is transformed into another Miss Brodie. "Has she really rejected Miss Brodie at all," asks Malkoff, "or has she destroyed her only to become her, renouncing worldly life as Brodie renounced Lloyd?"42 It is a question apparently seconded by Ann B. Dobie who, in the most incisive article yet written on the novel, refers to Sister Helena's discomfort with the world as stemming from "the knowledge that by her betrayal she simply replaced Miss Brodie rather than destroyed her...."43

To fully appreciate Sandy's role, however, it is important to recall the moral perspective which governs the novel. Malkoff, it has already been shown, supports such an approach, stating unequivocally that the novel's purpose is to explore "the moral significance of the betrayal." In such a scheme, he continues, "Sandy is near the center of consciousness of the novel" and through Miss Brodie "gains insight into herself and the nature of reality."44 Though he clearly understands her importance, Malkoff nonetheless faults Sandy by not extending the perspective of the novel beyond the betrayal itself to her retreat into the convent and her authorship of The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.
The betrayal is only the initial response to the perceived reality, represented on a very individual level in the person of Miss Brodie. But the evil engendered by her is only symptomatic of the greater "vision of disorder" discovered by Sandy, much as an internal cancer is first detected by its external results. (The metaphor is at least implicit in the novel.) Outside the small world of the girls' school, another world is racing toward the chaos of World War II. It is through Miss Brodie that the two come into contact, just as on every level in the novel she introduces innocence to experience. Thus she relates to her girls tales of the magnanimous accomplishments of the Nazi and Fascist regimes. Leading them through the poorer sections of Edinburgh where they come face to face with the sordid reality of unemployment and poverty, Miss Brodie summarily dismisses the scene from their consideration. In its place, she offers them a prayer for the Unemployed, composed by herself but apparently beseeching for the poor of Edinburgh the same Utopia of bliss and prosperity conferred by Mussolini on Italy. She then further banishes the reality they have glimpsed by causing the girls to laugh at a joke she tells, a joke that has as its butt just such a poor person as the ones they saw. She initiates them into experience but distorts the encounter. Sandy, however, must stop laughing for she perceives the truth unrelieved by Miss Brodie's fanciful, distracting dreams. The line of men waiting to receive
relief payment she sees as though it were a "slow jerkily moving file trembling" with life, she saw it all of a piece like one dragon's body which had no right to be in the city and yet would not go away and was unslayable." (60)

The corrupting effect of Miss Brodie's attempt to bring the girls to a realization of the warped reality she envisions is dramatically finalized by the death of Joyce Emily. The reality of the outside world, its evil and violence, comes to Sandy along with an awareness of Miss Brodie's imposed reality which, by falsifying experience, renders it even more dangerous. Two levels of reality Sandy therefore faces, the one a universal order of destructive, chaotic magnitude which "had no right to be there" but "would not go away and was unslayable," and the other a private order of imposed values, mirroring the other in its ultimate effects. As a young child, Sandy can evade awareness, even as she tries to avoid thinking of Edinburgh and its poor, by withdrawing into her warm home, "outside which even the corporate Brodie set lived in a colder sort of way." (60)

The death of Joyce Emily, crystallizing for her the perverse influence of Miss Brodie in the private world of her own making, demands responsible and immediate action on her part to abolish that influence and the artificial order accompanying it. But Sandy cannot cope in like manner with the awareness brought on by the war. Bred of ideals and dreams of regimented order which, like Miss Brodie's, are false and
dangerous, the global conflict indicates as well a collapse of moral judgment and value which obliterates nearly all existing levels of order. The "creeping vision of disorder" now clarified for Sandy is quite similar to that "dragon's body" she first saw in the company of Miss Brodie and every bit as indestructible. Again she withdraws, this time from the physical order itself. The convent becomes a new home, Sandy's newly discovered religion offering in the contemplative life of a nun a means of extreme retreat from the cold, deadening forces outside.

Consequently, the moral perspective which directs the novel is not limited to Sandy's immediate contact with Miss Brodie but expands to embrace her mature awareness that evil exists on a wider, more pervasive plane—-that of the physical order itself. Vision in the novel illuminates disorder as the dominant physical reality. The only recourse for Sandy therefore would seem to be the stability of a spiritual reality, to which she commits herself as exclusively as possible.

It is easy to understand why such action is deemed so negative by the critics. Mrs. Spark herself is not at all sympathetic with such behavior in her first novel, and Edwin Manders' retreat from life compares quite unfavorably to Caroline Rose's anticipated embrace of it. Yet Caroline's happiness, largely dependent upon her relationship with Laurence, remains at best anticipated. There are certain
difficulties which must be taken care of before their marriage can take place, and because of the general tone and movement of the novel, it is presumed they will be. But only presumed. It has been seen that marriage is an important theme for Mrs. Spark, the fulfillment and happiness achieved in a relationship between two people in some ways coinciding with the harmony of an ordered and balanced physical-spiritual reality. After The Comforters, however, the possibility of a happy marriage disappears for the heroes and heroines of Mrs. Spark's world. To return briefly to the novels already discussed: January Marlow retreats to spinsterhood; Dougal Douglas to the jungle, the monastery, and fiction; Jean Taylor to spinsterhood and ultimately death. With the important exception of The Mandelbaum Gate, the pattern remains consistent in Mrs. Spark's fiction and will be evident in discussion of the other novels. The failure of marriage, the union of two individuals in love, is only indicative of the growing rift between the two levels of reality. Happiness suggest fulfillment, but fulfillment is impossible in a divided world--at least for the person of vision. The individual must therefore commit himself to one or the other, the spiritual or the physical. This is Sandy's dilemma, and the convent becomes the commitment, a commitment that is indeed a retreat from the world but not from reality. Sandy sees and understands the divided nature of reality; she merely chooses sides
in the conflict.

In an article on the nature of reality in Mrs. Spark's work, Dobie fails to emphasize the important implications of this theme of renunciation. Writing about the function of vision in the novels, she states:

Some characters are not able to accept this richer, broader view of reality. To understand themselves and their world more fully is undesirable, for that experience is too unpleasant. Such characters react in two ways: either they remain two dimensional by ignoring the supernatural intrusions or they lose touch with reality altogether by having a breakdown or by renouncing the world.  

The generalizations are confusing, but apparently she has in mind the first four novels and such characters as the Baron, Robinson, Lettie, and Mr. Weedin. Even in these novels, however, those characteristics she demeans can apply to the heroes and heroines as well. What determines the value of the act therefore is the awareness and insight of the individual whose response it is. Toward the end of her article on *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Dobie perceives that it is the effect of vision which has driven Sandy to the convent, not in blindness but in awareness. Contradicting her earlier statement in the same article that what plagues Sandy is the fear that she has merely replaced Miss Brodie, Dobie finally concludes:

> It is vision itself. Just as Ronald Bridges [in *The Bachelors*] suffers
intensely as his understanding of the nature of the world grows, so Sandy the nun realizes with a measure of distress the extent of the goodness and evil in this world and other worlds. Her insight and her instinct... combine in Sandy to give her vision, which simultaneously disturbs and consoles.\textsuperscript{46}

Whatever consolation is derived by Sandy flows from her perception of a spiritual reality, an insight which comes to her by way of her Faith. Like so many of Mrs. Spark's other heroines, Sandy is a convert to Catholicism, and in \textit{The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie}, as in most of the other novels, religion plays a crucial part in shaping the dimensions of vision. For Sandy, Catholicism gives her something firm to which she can anchor herself in a world of shifting, relative values, just as later, when a special dispensation forces her to break her isolation from the outside world, she will cling tenaciously to the grille which safeguards her spiritual retreat. Authority is the anchor of the Catholic Church, and it is just such a defining force that Sandy seeks throughout the novel. What had bothered her as a child, it should be recalled, was the lack of rightness and lawfulness about Miss Brodie's teaching. Her manner of living is an affront as well so that, in her day dreams, Sandy steadfastly allies herself with Sergeant Anne Grey to prove Miss Brodie guilty of immoral behavior with the singing master. Again Mrs. Spark
supports the validity of vision as she did in *Peckham Rye* and *Memento Mori*, by linking it symbolically to the forces of law and order.

In discussing *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as a religious novel, Samuel Hynes calls the theme of Sandy's story "the theme of authority found and rejected, of Miss Brodie's power versus the power of the Church, and her education through the novel is an education in the meaning of authority." Though Hynes does not extend it beyond the religious sense, it can be readily seen that the question of authority also governs the political themes in the novel which are so important in giving body to Sandy's vision. Her discovery of authority, like her awareness of reality, comes by way of reaction to Miss Brodie on every level—political, religious, and even personal. It is by endeavoring to wrest Teddy Lloyd from his infatuation with Miss Brodie that Sandy becomes his mistress and, though in due time she "had quite lost interest in the man himself," she finds herself "deeply absorbed in his mind, from which she extracted, among other things, his religion as a pith from a husk." (180) Looking back over her life, Sandy suggests that the importance of one's youth lies in its influences, "even if they provide something to react against." When her interviewer then asks her what was her "biggest influence—Was it political, personal?
Was it Calvinism?"--she identifies "a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime." (52)

The role of authority then operates on many levels in the novel as does the definition of reality, but the function of both is most clearly expressed in a religious context unfolding in the conflict between Sandy and Miss Brodie. In contrast to Miss Brodie's smug self-assurance and self-appropriation of everything about her, Sandy, before her conversion, experiences a sense of deprivation, of exclusion from "some quality of life peculiar to Edinburgh and nowhere else" and no matter how "undesirable it might be she felt deprived of it." (158) As a young child, she had to remind herself that "her schooldays were supposed to be the happiest days of her life," (37) but in order to really enjoy them she was forced to live in an imaginary world of daydreams, "to lead a double life of her own in order never to be bored." (32) Yet the Edinburgh revealed to her by Miss Brodie was terrifying and Sandy withdrew from it in fear. Born of a heritage which exudes fear and must insist on happiness in order to experience it, she finally identifies the missing birthright as "the religion of Calvin...or rather a specified recognition of it," and the discovery finally gives her "something definite to reject." (158-159) It is the sense of Calvinistic predestination and self-election that Sandy
experiences "in the air she breathed" and smells "in the excesses of Miss Brodie in her prime," an odor not of holi-
ness but of decay rising from the dogma of Calvin who "made it God's pleasure to implant in certain people an erroneous sense of joy and salvation, so that their surprise at the end might be the nastier." (159)

The fears, false joys, and negative avowals of Calvin-
ism come to be embodied for Sandy in the person of Miss Brodie, and her consequent betrayal is obviously more a rejection of what she represents than of who she is. Only after she has converted to Catholicism with its rock-like authority from which she can apprehend an undeniably real-
istic order of values can Sandy move to put an end to Miss Brodie's influence. The Church offers a concrete authority imposed on the individual by a reality outside himself in contrast to Miss Brodie's personal sense of reality accord-
ing to which she imposes her authority on others. An authority outside herself she cannot accept and the Catho-
lic Church is repugnant to her for this very reason. Thus she wonders how Sandy, whose insight she acknowledges like her own, can have anything to do with Teddy Lloyd:

"He is a Roman Catholic and I don't see how you can have to do with a man who can't think for himself. Rose was suitable. Rose has instinct but no insight." (180)

Yet in a sense the authority of the Church, insofar as it
stabilizes Sandy's vision of reality, is Miss Brodie's undoing. For when Sandy tells her former teacher that she has not been betrayed, her actions have garnered the only just response possible, she speaks "like an enigmatic Pope." (185)

More than just the recipient of vision, Sandy is also its articulator. Her childhood ability with vowel sounds, as well as her eyes, serves her in good stead. As author of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, she enunciates in the title alone what almost every critic has delightfully concurred in pointing out is Mrs. Spark's concept of vision in her novels and the technique of her art. Enough has been said about the aptness of the description elsewhere, but what is of immediate interest is its particular application to Miss Jean Brodie and in particular to Sandy. Nothing more is said about *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* other than that it is an "odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception," (52-53) but it should be obvious that the novel itself, relating the story of an education into moral awareness, is the fictionalized reflection of its theme. After all, Sandy is Sister Helena of the Transfiguration. Yet the treatise is an "odd" one, and so finally is the novel itself, largely because of the enigma and ambiguity which persist about Sandy Stranger. Her actions in betraying Miss Brodie and joining the convent have been amply justified, but one cannot easily dispense with the irritating nature of her pig-eyed stare and the sense of
desperation with which she grasps the convent grille.

An even greater perspective is therefore added to the novel when one becomes aware that Sandy, as articulator of vision, is also another of Mrs. Spark's artist-figures and joins the likes of Caroline Rose, January Robinson, Dougal Douglas and Charmian Colston. As a young child, she fantasizes conversations with the Lady of Shalott, Robert Louis Stevenson's Alan Breck, and the dancer Anna Pavlova, her imagination creating for her another world peopled by the characters of poetry, fiction, and art. Together with Jenny Gray, she even authors a story entitled "The Mountain Eyrie," dealing with Miss Brodie's love affair with Hugh Carruthers. It is therefore valid to include Sandy in the ranks of Mrs. Spark's artists, and yet when one analyzes her characterization in respect to her predecessors, there is very noticeable an important change of attitude on the part of the author regarding the function of art in delineating a moral order, a change of perspective that is not sudden but has been gradually evolving since The Comforters. Whereas Caroline, January, and Dougal all transfer the reality of vision to their art--at least to some degree--their efforts are successively marked by greater difficulty and danger and apparently received with less and less success. Mrs. Spark, however, is obviously in sympathy with both their artistic endeavors and vision, but in Memento Mori the artist is found wanting. Mrs. Spark rejects
Charmian's approach to reality as inadequate though she still portrays her with a great deal of affection. Sandy Stranger, on the other hand, herself rejects art, at least to some extent, and while Mrs. Spark endorses her vision, she depicts her, if not quite unsympathetically, then at least unmitigatingly. Perhaps *realistically* would be more in line with the developed Sparkian awareness, for what is clear in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is that art of itself cannot cope with the savage reality laid bare by vision, and this realization is for Mrs. Spark a fact and a shame.

What elicits Miss Brodie's admiration and prompts her famous announcement, "Where there is no vision...the people perish," is the following passage from Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott:"

She left the web, she left the loom,  
She made three paces thro' the room,  
She saw the water-lily bloom,  
She saw the helmet and the plume,  
She look'd down to Camelot. (12-13)

Imprisoned in her isolated tower, the Lady can take part in life only vicariously through the art of her tapestry and by means of the reflections in the mirror. Unable to satisfy her love for Lancelot, however, art provides only a limited access to reality. In contrast to Miss Brodie's statement, it is the actual sight of reality that destroys her, for looking on Camelot brings with it the curse of death. Yet look she will, and it is as she is preparing
her funeral barge that Sandy joins her in imagination. Their fates, it is suggested, are to be similar as the Lady remarks sadly to Sandy: "That one so young and beautiful should be so ill-fated in love!" (33) This is the daydream of a child, but it is also the ultimate truth, looking ahead to Sandy enclosed in the convent. Art offers beauty, love, and happiness, but it is not realistic. A beautiful dream, it only mirrors possibilities which vanish when confronted with reality. Sandy dreams of saving Alan Breck's life, but she is powerless to prevent Joyce Emily's futile death. From Anna Pavlova she imagines the highest praise: "...you are an artist and will carry on the torch." (93) But her admiration for the dancer is bred of her admiration for Miss Brodie, who exhorts the girls to imitate Pavlova in order that they might "grow up to be dedicated women as I have dedicated myself to you." (93) Miss Brodie links together art and reality as another exercise of her will, but Sandy, upon whom Pavlova looks "with the eyes of tragic exile and of art," (93) finally rejects that form of dedication and the view of art which it endorses as false. Instead, she chooses the exile of the convent and the art, not of beauty and love, but of reality and the moral treatise. Mrs. Spark emphasizes the fact of this choice and its importance in determining the moral perspective of the novel by leaping ahead in time from the con-
versation about Pavlova to Miss Brodie's discovery that Sandy has entered the convent: "What a waste. That is not the sort of dedication I meant....I begin to wonder if it was not Sandy who betrayed me." (93-94)

Earlier in the novel Miss Brodie had proclaimed to her girls "the order of the great subjects of life:" "Art and religion first; then philosophy; lastly science....that's their order of importance." (39) Though she joins together art and religion, their only common link in the Brodie world is a forged prescription of value and worth by the Brodie mind and the Brodie will. As with religion, so with art--judgment and truth rest with Miss Brodie. When one of the girls is asked to identify the greatest Italian painter and replies, "Leonardo da Vinci," Miss Brodie reproves her: "That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite." (18) Moreover, Miss Brodie's love of art parallels her love for Teddy Lloyd, the painter, and the perversity of the latter reflects on the misguided principles of the former. For Sandy Stranger then, art partakes of the unreal world of Jean Brodie, and she must renounce it. Thus her story of "The Mountain Eyrie" comes to an end with her postulation that Miss Brodie is sleeping with Gordon Lowther as a substitute for Teddy Lloyd. Art reveals an immoral world created in the likeness of Jean Brodie, and Sandy rejects the one with the other. For Miss Brodie as artist draws deception from truth and paints reality unreal-
istically. This awareness is suddenly and vividly brought home to Sandy when she realizes that Miss Brodie is arranging the story of her love affair with Hugh Carruthers to fit the new relationship with Teddy Lloyd:

Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct. (106)

Yet what is seemingly a choice between art and moral truth is actually resolved only by applying the principles of art to the facts of truth. Not art itself but as it is appropriated by Miss Brodie is what must be renounced. In a very real sense, it is as an artist, but an artist of a new reality, that Sandy functions in the novel. The technique she learns from her tutors:

...Sandy was fascinated by the economy of Teddy Lloyd's method, as she had been four years earlier by Miss Brodie's variations on her love story....Teddy Lloyd's method of presentation was similar [all his portraits resemble Miss Brodie], it was economical, and it always seemed afterwards to Sandy that where there was a choice of various courses, the most economical was the best, and that the course to be taken was the most expedient and most suitable at the time for all the objects in hand. She acted on this principle when the time came for her to betray Miss Brodie. (149)

No longer the artist of fanciful dreams and speculative stories, she discards the Brodie world of art, its beauty as well as its deception, to probe the world of moral
reality. This is the realm of true art, and Sandy with her odd treatise is oddly enough the artist, possessed of its vision and bound by its commitment, even to betrayal and renunciation.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark carries the responsibility demanded of vision to that extreme toward which it has been directed since even *The Comforters*—absolute renunciation of the physical world in view of the nature of reality. In the first three novels discussed, vision is greeted with a steadily diminishing sense of joy and an increasingly somber awareness of what kind of response is required. Reality is perceived in the richness of its two-fold nature, but it is the conflict between the spiritual and physical elements that is more and more emphasized, to such a degree that acceptance of spiritual responsibility can only be fully realized at the expense of physical happiness. The moral order is rendered asunder, for the physical world upon which it operates denies its legitimacy. *Memento Mori* portrays death as the link between the two elements, the moral order thereby governed by an awareness of suffering and the ultimate loss of physical life and happiness. Promise lies beyond death, but Mrs. Spark chooses to concentrate on its opposite in the physical realm—loss. Since most of the characters in the novel are already near death, however, the renunciation demanded of them does not seem so extreme or unacceptable. The irony, of course, is that
nearly all of them are still unwilling to accept the fact of their own mortality, a fact that is a fate finally thrust on them willing or not. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, however, is far more unrelenting and bleak in outlining the requirements of vision since it is of the young and innocent that renunciation and loss are demanded in that novel. (The title is ironic since it is the girls who are really in the prime of youth and innocence.) Miss Brodie accommodates the term freely to fit her present stage of life, no matter when that might be. Malkoff too suggests the irony when he explains Miss Brodie's prime as being "(in her case, her forties)."48

The quality of loss is perhaps best illustrated by the failure and rejection of love as expressed in sexual relationships. Love, as Muriel Spark understands it, is no Romantic wisp of longing and aethereal sigh of affection. Love is a physical reality rendered complete only through sexual expression. Sex therefore plays an important part in her novels, grounding human love in the physical order. Since that order is decadent, however, it can reflect only an imperfect love, a theme already evidenced in the glaring lack of successful marriages in the novels. But lack of marriage obviously does not preclude the practise of sex, and Mrs. Spark's heroines and heroes often have affairs and sometimes even enjoy them. Usually, however, the affairs
precede conversion, a frequent stepping-stone to vision, and after the dawn of awareness sex is banished as the possibility of a happy marriage almost inevitably vanishes. Caroline Rose no longer sleeps with the man she loves. January Marlow's widowhood seems to concur with her Catholicism; as a Catholic, she cannot engage in sex outside of marriage, but marriage, like the island of Robinson, is a sinking possibility. Once Humphrey Place comes under the influence of Dougal Douglas his girl friend will no longer sleep with him, and Dougal himself is a rejected suitor. Jean Taylor, like Sandy Stranger, rejects her lover and apparently retreats into celibacy for the rest of her life. Sex is the means to the most fulfilling of human happinesses on earth, but just as love and marriage seem unattainable in a world now given over to decay and loss of value, so too is sex inadequate and misleading in its promise and effect. The physical order is morally diseased, and since sex is one of the primary aspects of physical nature, it is not surprising to find sexual relationships grown sterile and even perverse. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, more than any other of Mrs. Spark's novels, deals with the loss of innocence in the world, an innocence that is strangely associated with erotic wonder. Sexuality is a topic of great delight and speculation to the young girls and they approach its mysteries with reverence and awe. Its promise is part of their Edenic innocence, but experience and reality nullify both. Jenny's
encounter with the exhibitionist, another of Mrs. Spark's sexual perverts, sustains Sandy's growing awareness of the illicit sexual behavior of Miss Brodie, and it is her experience and function in Miss Brodie's sexual schemes that contributes in large part to the vision of disorder which drives her to the convent. The innocence and joy which by nature belong to sex are lost in a fallen world of corrupt experience. Vision betrays happiness as Sandy betrays Miss Brodie, according to the dictates of reality. In the physical order reality is loss, and the promise of sexual fulfillment, the promise of love and happiness, an almost forgotten ideal. Its passing is most effectively eulogized in a splendid passage from The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie strikingly similar to the conclusions of Robinson and The Ballad of Peckham Rye:

"There's not much time for sex research in the Senior school," Sandy said. "I feel I'm past it," said Jenny. This was strangely true, and she did not again experience her early sense of erotic wonder in life until suddenly one day when she was nearly forty....It happened she was standing with a man whom she did not know very well outside a famous building in Rome, waiting for the rain to stop. She was surprised by a reawakening of that same buoyant and airy discovery of sex, a total sensation which it was impossible to say was physical or mental, only that it contained the lost and guileless delight of her eleventh year. She supposed herself to have fallen in love with the man, who might, she
thought, have been moved towards her in his own way out of a world of his own, the associations of which were largely unknown to her. There was nothing whatever to be done about it, for Jenny had been contentedly married for sixteen years past; but the concise happening filled her with astonishment whenever it came to mind in later days, and with a sense of the hidden possibilities in all things. (118-119)

In the earlier novels, the sense of possibility in all things was an undefined awareness, conferred by vision, of the extent of reality, a moral sense of the joy and promise imbued in nature and men's lives by the knowledge that order transcends the limitations of physical being and, in so doing, restructures physical existence according to a positive norm of value and worth. In The Comforters, "possibility" at first seemed attainable on the physical level itself, but Robinson and Peckham Rye each view it with a backward glance of regret, while Memento Mori ignores it to concentrate on the obsessive presence of death. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie looks back once again, with a note of finality, to a possibility that is lost. It is Mrs. Spark's most effective, yet subtle, statement of the problems facing the moral consciousness in an immoral world. Though she will try in The Mandelbaum Gate to render that vision less uncompromising, the attempt, like the novel itself, does not convince. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie firmly establishes that "vision of disorder" which is at the basis of all her novels, an awareness that the balance
between the spiritual and physical elements of reality has been violently disrupted by the presence of evil and that to understand one's responsibility in this divided order is to realize that happiness can be found only beyond and in fulfillment of the demands imposed by a spiritual consciousness.

Sandy's is a negative vision by emphasis and it disturbs more than it consoles. So finally does she the Stranger, its articulator in the novel, and therein lies possibly one of the most revealing aspects of Mrs. Spark herself. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, writes Hoyt, the central conflict of the novel, "so enigmatic, so wryly amusing and yet profound, is that of Mrs. Spark's own life." He explains that "The excitement infused into all her best fiction, that duality...derives from some formidable charge of Edinburgh Calvinism against its opposite, the negative of mystical Catholicism." Though Hoyt chooses to remain vague about assigning these functions in the novel, he does view Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger as complementary halves of Muriel Spark. And just as these two represent the conflict of dualities which makes the book go--authority vs. the individual, religion vs. art, the spiritual vs. the physical, the realist vs. the dreamer, innocence vs. experience, the convent vs. the world outside--so too do they represent the conflict within Mrs. Spark herself in trying to give form to a reality which she, like Sandy, perceives as divided. Miss
Brodie plunges heedlessly into the various forms of experience, inducing a sense of reckless joy, while Sandy withdraws from experience, which she discovers to be false, thereby extinguishing all joy. The world of Miss Brodie glitters with delight and promise, while Sandy's cell is dark and foreboding. Miss Brodie is beautiful but Sandy Stranger is true.

What bothers the reader about Sandy Stranger then is what bothers Muriel Spark about herself: the uncompromising renunciation demanded by vision. Her Catholicism had brought with it an initial sense of joy, evidenced in the autobiographical qualities of *The Comforters*, but herself a daughter of Edinburgh and its inbred negative outlook, she has had "to put up a psychological fight for my spiritual joy."\(^{50}\) Nor does she often succeed in conveying that joy in her novels. What does emerge, in Wildman's words, is "the intellectual pessimist's self-cooled poise and...[the emotional pessimist's] perhaps more hopeful days in the desert."\(^{51}\)

Truth, it has been seen, is what Muriel Spark seeks in her religion and in her art, but her characters unfortunately do not always find the two compatible. In the novels, it is not easy to consolidate the forms of art, derived from the physical world, with the claims of truth gleaned from the spiritual. There is a disjunction in the moral order which has rendered incompatible the two realms of experience. Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger are tragically separated by the
dividing grille: the dreamer from the realist, the artist from the mystic, the sensualist from the ascetic. It is a vision of division which Muriel Spark conveys in her novel and which quite possibly disturbs her as much as it does Sandy. For there is a good deal of the Brodie as well as the Stranger in the author. In 1961, the same year in which *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* was published, Mrs. Spark, writing about her conversion, reveals that it is through her art that she has been able to reconcile these two contrasting natures within herself. "It's a bit of a nuisance," she writes, "not being able to have a sex life if you are not married, but it has its advantages if you have a vocation, a mind obsessed with a certain subject or a job to do in life."52 Cut off, like Sandy, from physical enjoyment, she nevertheless works it off, like Miss Brodie, on another calling. Her art then, "out of which a kind of truth emerges,"53 becomes her vocation, and she is able to attain a unity of perspective that is denied her characters.

A precarious resolution it may seem, but the accomplishment of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* stems from its balanced portrayal of the conflict between two orders of thought and allegiance. The convincing ambiguity of the novel, says Malkoff, is its achievement, showing the best and the worst of the possible worlds.54 The later novels are unable to sustain this balance, vision in them growing increasingly darker and uncompromising in outlook. The
Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is both a delightful romp in the innocent world of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls and a cold-blooded education into the experienced world of Jean Brodie.

Beauty and terror, innocence and experience walk gingerly hand in hand in what is thus far Mrs. Spark's best novel.

The footfalls grow more ominous in those to come.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


2. Hoyt, p. 135.


6. What shall I do with this absurdity--
   O heart, O troubled heart--this caricature
   Decrepit age that has been tied to me
   As to a dog's tail?

   --W.B. Yeats, *The Tower*

   O what venerable and reverent creatures did the aged
   seem! Immortal Cherubims!

   --Thomas Traherene,
   *Centuries of Meditation*

   Q. What are the four last things to be ever remembered?
   A. The four last things to be ever remembered are
      Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven.

   --The Penny Catechism

7. Stanford, pp. 128-129.


22. In *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* Mrs. Spark tried to recapture the sense of possibility and happiness glimpsed in her first two novels, but it is interesting to note that to do so, after *Memento Mori*, she must resort to the madcap antics of Dougal Douglas, an almost mythic figure purposely rendered so by the perspective of the ballad form. In comparison to the characters of the other three novels, Dougal is almost a fantasy figure.
37. Hynes, p. 568.
38. Hynes, p. 568.
40. Malkoff, Spark, p. 35.
41. Malkoff, Spark, p. 35.
42. Malkoff, Spark, p. 35.
44. Malkoff, Spark, pp. 32-33.
47. Hynes, p. 568.
49. Hoyt, p. 141.
51. Wildman, pp. 142-143.
54. Malkoff, Spark, p. 35.
CHAPTER IV

MEN AND WOMEN: The Bachelors and The Girls of Slender Means

If The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie operates upon an equation involving the factors of innocence and experience, the novel immediately preceding it defines in depth the capacity for expression of only one of those factors—experience. The Bachelors is a depiction of frustration, the offspring of experience in a twilight world of moral sterility. Experienced observers in Mrs. Spark's kingdom, like Jean Taylor and Sandy Stranger, perceive a battleground of shattered values over which hovers an abiding vision of disorder. But in both Memento Mori and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, innocence is at least at the beck of memory as though the author cannot completely close her eyes to a glimpse, however brief, of a possibility that once was. Not so in The Bachelors. While redemption exacts responsible involvement of the protagonists in the other two novels, it also affords a means of withdrawal, again however qualified, from the sordid realities of the material world. Jean Taylor and Sandy Stranger do find a kind of refuge in the sick ward and in the convent where they can confront God in private and society from a distance. They suffer, it is true, but as conscious participants, not victims. On the other hand, Ronald Bridges, the man of
vision in *The Bachelors*, is quite literally a victim as well as a responsible participant in the realm of experience. Cursed with epilepsy, he is denied admission to the priesthood and told, "quite seriously," that his vocation in life is to be "a first-rate epileptic." (14) God, who was a source of comfort and recourse in *Memento Mori*, is now the "vigilant manipulator of the falling sickness," (116) according to Whose Will, it is stated, Ronald is what he is. ¹

Barred from the priesthood by his illness and unwilling to sacrifice his self-responsibility in marriage to a woman who would smother him with care, Ronald is doomed to bachelorhood which becomes synonymous in the novel with a pervading sense of emptiness and melancholy. John Updike goes so far as to call its theme "bachelorhood considered as a territory of damnation."² Ronald Bridges wanders the streets of London, "the great city of bachelors," (9) unable to sleep because of "his demons:" his friends, his acquaintances, and himself. They are "fruitless souls, crumbling tinder, like his own self which did not bear thinking of." (218) His final reflections conclude and summarize the vision of reality which lies, like darkness, over the novel:

> It is all demonology and to do with creatures of the air, and there are others beside ourselves, he thought, who lie in their beds like happy countries that have no history. Others ferment in prison; some rot, maimed; some lean over the banisters of presbyteries
to see if anyone is going to answer the telephone. (219)

Nor is it misleading to identify the peculiar quality of bachelorhood as the universal definition of experience in the novel. Mrs. Spark has said that when she wrote The Bachelors it seemed to her "that everyone was a bachelor."

Malkoff further universalizes the term "in the sense of people alone, searching for union with other men, or with something larger than themselves." The novel then does function on two levels, its large cast of characters literal bachelors in a loveless world of material values and spiritual bachelors in a divided moral order at war between good and evil. The general conflict is common to Mrs. Spark's other novels; its presentation here, however, is more drastic and extreme.

The surface plot of The Bachelors reads much like a typical mystery story, including elements of embezzlement, premeditated murder, and the necessary climactic trial scene. There is, in fact, an undeniable reliance on the genre of the mystery novel in many of Mrs. Spark's books, and Charles Alva Hoyt even finds affinities between her and such writers as Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and Josephine Tey, to name a few.

In the present novel, Patrick Seton, a spiritualist medium, is to be brought to trial on charges of cajoling a widow, whom he has charmed and used, out of a large sum of money. Relying on a successful outcome to the
trial, he meanwhile hatches a diabolical scheme to murder his pregnant diabetic mistress with an overdose of insulin in order to "release her spirit from the gross body." (161) Against his efforts stands the Law which, with the aid of Ronald Bridges, a forgery expert, attempts to prove Seton's guilt in the lesser crime and thus unwittingly prevent the greater one from happening.

Conflict between law and order is the mainstay of the detective-mystery story, but it assumes even greater significance in The Bachelors, a novel which plumbs the mystery of reality itself. The crime is not Mrs. Spark's chief concern, but the criminal; and the criminal, Ronald Bridges realizes, is man. Martin Bowles, the prosecuting attorney at Seton's trial, is actually guilty of the same offense as the defendant, for he too uses his sexual relations with Isobel Billows to gain control of her money. In fact, Ronald mentally calls to trial all his acquaintances, "a company of ridiculous demons," (111) and finds them guilty: Martin Bowles of fraudulent conversion, not only of money but of love; Isobel Billows of adultery; Tim Raymond of lack of any sense of involvement, except in a secretive affair with Ronald's former lover; and the list goes on, driving Ronald to the desperate, mechanical recitation of a passage from St. Paul urging virtue and merit as the argument of one's thoughts instead of the "disgust, despair and brain-burning" (111) which so obsess him. The cure, in keeping
with the general tone of the novel, proves largely ineffective.

What Ronald glimpses, along with Mrs. Spark, is a world devoid of love. "And it's a fairly bleak world when all is said and done," (44) as another of the characters remarks. Just as marriage had earlier represented for the author a means of fulfillment and a union of the two orders of reality, here bachelorhood suggests the sterility and loss resulting from their disjuncture. Sex becomes a function not of love but of perversity and destruction. Seton plans to murder his mistress and unborn child in the name of love, while Dr. Lyte, the man from whom he procures the insulin to carry out the crime, has already murdered a girl friend whom he was trying to abort. Father Socket and Mike Garland, partners in crime and homosexuality, specialize in blackmail and the presentation of sex shows, both live and on film.

Even when they are not criminally perverted, sexual relations between men and women are still warped and distorted by the absence of love, which in turn renders the sex act sterile. Thus Elsie Forrest complains to Ronald about her need for sex and the inability to find love:

"But I can't do without it, and these men know it. They fumble about with their french letters or they tear open their horrible little packets of contraceptives like kids with sweets, or they expect me to have a rubber stop-gap all ready fitted. All
the time I want to be in love with
the man and conceive his child, but
I keep thinking of the birth-control
and something inside me turns in the
glove. You can't enjoy sex in that
frame of mind." (167-168)

It would be all too tempting to dismiss such a statement
as reflecting a Church-imposed attitude toward birth con-
trol were it not for Mrs. Spark's explicit statement to the
contrary:

I don't know how you manage about
children, I don't quite understand
that side of Catholicism. I married
and had my son long before I became
a Catholic. Perhaps I would feel a
different sort of Catholic altogether
if I was obliged to have a large
family. But then the psychological
effect of birth control is a bad
thing, I think. It's a horrible
thing for a woman. I did deal a
little with it in a book of mine
called The Bachelors.6

The side of birth control which Mrs. Spark indict is that
which limits sex to a physical sensation without commitment
or responsibility. The issue only serves to underline the
general failure of love in the novel. Matthew Finch, who
claims to Ronald, "It's fear of responsibility that puts
me off marriage," (80) nevertheless sleeps with Elsie, only
to drop her almost immediately for her roommate, Alice
Dawes, who is also Seton's pregnant mistress. Seton him-
self, who has "always believed in free love," (94) cannot
abide the "disgusting details" of his first sexual encounter
for, as he says, "There is a lot of nasty stuff in life
which comes breaking up our ecstasy, our inheritance." And if, shortly after, there happens to be a girl about to have a baby, "that is her business." (160) It is only upon Alice's insistence that Seton forces the lie about their coming marriage and later formulates the murder plan. Ironically enough, however, her illegitimate pregnancy is largely responsible for Matthew's infatuation with her, resulting in their marriage a week before the baby's birth.

If Matthew's marriage and the birth of the child are meant to lend some glimmer of promise to the end of the novel, it is faint indeed. Ronald speculates wryly on the length of time it will take Matthew to marry Alice and immediately jumps to his final conclusions about "demonology" and "creatures of the air." What abides instead of the affirmative possibilities of such a union is the bitter irony which surrounds it. Though he had earlier begged off marriage to Alice in a conversation with Ronald--"I don't want to get married, you know" (79)--and shuns the thought of responsibility it entails, Matthew finally marries her because he is obsessed with her swelling stomach, a by-product of the monstrous Seton. A true minister of evil, Seton is the only one in the novel who fathers offspring, and Alice, a rather stupid, superficial girl, is impregnated with anything but love. Meanwhile her friend Elsie, who wants more than anything to conceive a child in love, re-
mains an abused sex object who garners only loneliness for her ventures. Ronald finds "a whole philosophy" applicable to her situation which readily applies to his own loneliness as well: "It turns on the question whether it's best not to be born in the first place." Appalled by the extreme negativism of his statement, Elsie counters with the observation that birth "is basic. You don't need to have company in the same way as you need to be born." To which Ronald acquiesces, but barely: "There's a lot in what you say." (167) His reassurance is scarcely convincing.

Harold W. Schneider writes that it is "Ronald's vision of the world which informs the novel and invests it with what is its essentially sad dignity." Perhaps "sad" is too mild in light of Ronald's assertion that "It is better...to be a pessimist in life, it makes life endurable." (103) Yet Schneider does correctly appraise the general quality of gloom which hangs over the novel. On the level of material reality, the possibility of happiness disappears as the impossibility of marriage is clarified. In the novels prior to The Bachelors, Mrs. Spark's heroes and heroines found marriage at least within reach, even if it did finally elude them. Ronald Bridges, however, is "a confirmed bachelor." (79) After his fruitless affair with Hildegarde, he withdraws into a life of almost priestly celibacy. Unable to pursue the religious vocation he desires, he nevertheless endures its restrictions. Hildegarde meanwhile converts to
Catholicism and becomes a nun.

Like Sandy Stranger who retreats behind the convent grille and Nicholas Farringdon who joins the priesthood in *The Girls of Slender Means*, Ronald is cut off from the comfort and pleasure of physical love by a commitment to vision which isolates him from any type of personal fulfillment on the physical level. Irving Malin suggests that "He 'bridges' worlds...of secularism and religion," yet what he himself primarily suffers is the stress of that bond. Denied the consolations of the priesthood, he is nonetheless hounded by others who consult him "on the nature of things...in the same way" as if "he had been a priest." (67) When Matthew Finch, for instance, queries him on the responsibilities of marriage, it is as though he were addressing "a tall black frock." (78) In a novel which deals in some detail with seances and spiritualist meetings, Ronald himself acts as a type of medium, or in Christian terms a confessor, between the worlds of physical and spiritual reality. Malkoff refers to the similarity between Ronald's epileptic seizures and Patrick Seton's spiritualistic trances. Furthermore, it is his epilepsy, called "the sacred disease" among other things, which distinguishes Ronald for his friends "as a sacred cow or a wise monkey," (67) even as Seton's authenticity as a medium is attested to by the quality of his seizures. Like a medium then, Ronald suffers as an emissary between two worlds, and his vision reflects the painful
awareness of a divided moral order admitting of fulfillment only through sacrifice. The physical fits which wrack his body parallel theanguished moods of despair and loneliness which wring his soul. In a very real state of limbo created by the loss of recourse, either to the religious life or to marriage, Ronald seems only to affirm the truth of Matthew Finch's baleful observation: "It's an unnatural life if one's a Christian." (79)

The world itself is an unnatural place in The Bachelors, defined by perverse love, crime, and deceit. The stench of decay attending the corruption of the moral order is here more strikingly evident than in any of the novels prior to and including The Mandelbaum Gate. Schneider even feels that it is her concentration on the sordid "that keeps one from pronouncing this Mrs. Spark's finest work...."10 Yet if The Bachelors seems somewhat extreme in its dissec-
tion of a sick and weakened moral structure, it is because Mrs. Spark chooses to emphasize the deadly serious nature of the struggle between good and evil in terms of extreme moral realities. The battleground, as in Memento Mori, is a dis-
eased world of experience or, as in Robinson, a ruined paradise. The protagonists are none other than God, "the vigilant manipulator" of Ronald Bridges, and the devil, who speaks through the mouth of Seton. (Malkoff points out that the name "is probably pronounced sātan.")11 At stake, among other things, are the Faith and life of Alice Dawes, who
solemnly declares before Seton's trial that she considers the whole affair a test of God: "If Patrick doesn't get off, I don't believe in God." (188) And if he does, though Alice does not realize it, she and her unborn child will most assuredly die.

In regard to this struggle between good and evil, most of her critics have failed to see any concrete manifestation of supernatural reality in *The Bachelors* comparable to its governing presence in the preceding novels. Nevertheless, as in *The Comforters* and *Memento Mori*, supernatural forces intrude very definitely upon the physical plane of reality. There can be, for instance, little doubt regarding Seton's legitimacy as a medium, a fact amply verified by his revelation of Dr. Lyte's crime. Even Ronald Bridges professes belief in Seton's spiritualist powers--"I think he's a genuine medium, from what I've heard." (86) In addition, there is a great deal of play with the subjects of occultism and magic, elements that were common to *Robinson* and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. Yet *The Bachelors* is also the last novel thus far in which Mrs. Spark has recourse to these blatant manifestations of supernatural reality and seems to represent a culmination, or possibly cul-de-sac, in her efforts to embody the spiritual in physical form. Dobie, however, in an article on the nature of reality in Mrs. Spark's fiction, passes off the supernatural in *The Bachelors* as "hardly more exceptional than spiritualism as
practised by a group of people who, though half-skeptical, are eventually dominated by it."\textsuperscript{12} Baldanza, whose study of Mrs. Spark concentrates on the role of the occult, seems to feel that Seton is merely a fraud as a medium. Accordingly, he grossly misreads the novel when he states, "it is assumed that the practitioners of the occult are petty criminals, and their victims are gullible, neurotic, middle-aged women."\textsuperscript{13} In his general study of the novels, Malkoff feels that Seton is undoubtedly "in communication with the spirit world,"\textsuperscript{14} but in a later article dealing specifically with demonology and dualism he refuses to accept Seton, whose fiendishness he admits, as "the incarnation of evil or immorality." Rather, he is merely at polar opposites to the extreme materialist, attuned only to the workings of the spirit and thus guilty of failing to appraise the whole of reality.\textsuperscript{15} The fault is not an unusual one in Mrs. Spark's fiction.

To thus deemphasize the function of Seton in the novel as an agent of evil is to allay unduly the terrible vision of moral conflict which lies at the core of \textit{The Bachelors}. The novel is full of references to demons, as Malkoff points out more than once, but like Dobie, he tends to dismiss their satanic authenticity. She, for instance, has written about the supernatural forces in Mrs. Spark's novels:

\begin{quote}
...they are not in themselves evil and must not be interpreted as such. They are often described as diabolical
\end{quote}
or demonic, but they are never referred to as devils or as devilish. Their purpose is not to destroy or to harm, though sometimes they do so.... In Muriel Spark's novels their sole purpose is to disrupt the ordinary and the habitual, to confuse the traditional and the acceptable, to blend the commonplace and the supernatural so that a new concept of reality emerges, one which is closer to truth. 16

While such an analysis correctly describes the role and function of a Dougal Douglas, it takes too glancing a look at the likes of Patrick Seton, whose purpose is to destroy and through whom Satan explicitly identifies himself. The central vision of The Bachelors reveals the presence of evil as a supernatural fact in the world of experience. Sandy Stranger glimpsed a "creeping vision of disorder" in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie that was the work of man himself. In The Bachelors, however, that reality is given its own distinct embodiment as an unnatural force working upon the world of men. Just before Seton's trial, Marlene Cooper, his devoted disciple and protector, urges him to undertake a final seance with her and Father Socket in order to obtain "a few moments' spiritual repose." As Seton falls into the trance, she whispers to Socket, "He may prophesy." And indeed he does, in what is one of the most quietly terrifying scenes in all of Mrs. Spark's fiction:

In a voice not his, he pronounced, "I creep."

Marlene's arm went rigid. Socket tried to release his hand but could not.
Patrick's mouth was foaming. His head dropped and his eyes closed. He breathed loudly. His fingers twitched on the end of the chair-arm. Presently he lifted up his head again and his eyes opened into slits. (185-186, my italics)

Everything about the scene suggests the primeval Snake and his function in a world grown unnatural after the Fall. Patrick's prophecy is a pronouncement of the abiding power of evil itself, and he, like Socket, is its servant. After the seance, Marlene, who had previously been most active in rallying witnesses for Patrick's defense, suddenly gives up the cause and flees to Scotland, fearful nevertheless that even there "Patrick might have some spiritual power over her." (190) Not basically evil, only vain and selfish, Marlene is as horrified of the depths she has glimpsed as Dr. Lyte is shaken by the implications of a supernatural reality following Patrick's discovery, while in a trance, of the hushed-up abortion and murder. His reaction is a similar type of recoil; he simply "found it less frightening to believe that Patrick was a common blackmailer, and no medium between this world and the other." (99) Father Socket, on the other hand, himself a fraud both spiritually and sexually who panders flesh for profit and passes off poetry for prayer, allies himself with Seton at the trial, a fitting witness to the minister and ministrations of evil.

Though it would seem that Seton's conviction and imprisonment would signify a triumph over the forces of evil,
the conquering vision is only a mirage. What is achieved, at best, is a stalemate in the conflict of moral realities, and stalemates are seldom consoling. Alice Dawes and her baby are saved from Seton's clutches, but her salvation, resting as it does in Patrick's sentence, draws from her a denial of God. The Law, in the person of Martin Bowles, emerges once again in Mrs. Spark's world as an apparent buttress against the encroachment of moral chaos. But Bowles is no Mortimer, and the distinction is important. Patrick's denial of marriage and other "man-made laws," (94) reflecting a general lawlessness of the spirit as well as of the body, is countered by his imprisonmen; Martin Bowles, however, who is in many ways Seton's double in the subversion of marriage and the Law, goes free. Corruption and hypocrisy are the law of the land in The Bachelors, as Ronald realizes while observing the ruthless tactics of the prosecutor at the trial. His judgment is inescapable: "It's a dirty world." (208)

Even art falls victim to the general flow of abortive values and sordid relationships which inundates The Bachelors. In Mrs. Spark's earliest novels, it was the artist who possessed vision, and the accompanying awareness was closely connected to artistic expression. While Charmian Colston did substitute ease and comfort for commitment and responsibility, she remained nevertheless basically sympathetic and likable as a character and in many ways even
admirable. Those connected with artistic endeavors in The Bachelors, however, are either shallow and impotent or villainous and perverse. The least harmful of the lot are Ronald's friends who gather at the bar of the Pandaemonium Club, their rightful abode. They were, Mrs. Spark writes, fairly representative of the arts side: a television actor, a Welsh tenor, a film extra who took peasant-labourer parts when they were available, a ballet-mistress, and a stock-broker who was writing a novel. (68)

A catalogue of characters hardly fit to inspire anything but pandemonium in the arts, and yet it further emphasizes the decline of values which permeates every range of experience in a fallen world. Walter Prett, for instance, an art critic who rages fantastically at bourgeois tastes and phantasizes sadly about imagined love-affairs that never were, confesses that the lives of artists, and he considers himself one, are sterile and empty. "I have spent a long time not doing anything," he says, and then goes on to classify this failing as the artist's mark of guilt: "The sins of the artist are sins of omission." (188)

The note of moral culpability explicit in the failure of the artist is further intensified in Mrs. Spark's treatment of Patrick Seton and Father Socket, both of whom are continually referred to as artists and poets. Alice declares that Patrick's "a sort of a real artist" and that he means everything to her because "He loves poetry and
beauty." (26) Freda Flower, whom Patrick has swindled sexually and financially, echoes the same sentiment: "He's a poet at heart." (61) It is, in fact, "His poetic innocence," (159) Mrs. Spark relates, that leads Patrick to take various advantages of the women he encounters. Father Socket, on the other hand, "the true Master of writing" (122) in Elsie Forrest's eyes, is also a great reciter of poetry. Mrs. Spark shows him at work on Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" in a brief scene that is strategically located in the middle of a detailed revelation of his perverse relationship with Mike Garland and his criminal activities as a pimp and blackmailer. Dissatisfied because he has failed to stress properly the key passage in a recording of the poem, Socket repeats it to Garland:

"I should have taken 'Drive my dead thoughts...' more slowly. They are all monosyllabic words, each word should be spoken with equal stress. Drive--my--dead--thoughts...like that."

To which his disciple replies, "It gives one a frisson." (153)

Like Seton's "I creep," Father Socket's "Drive--my--dead--thoughts" induces a chill of horror, a tremor of foreboding at the vision implied by the exhortation. Shelley's poetry was to be the prophecy of a new birth of consciousness and creativity. In Socket's mouth, however, the words echo a declaration of death and sterility, alarming even Garland. Instead of being the legislator of truth as Shelley envisioned him, the poet has become the purveyor
of lies. The twilight world of *The Bachelors* finds the artist either incapable of coping with the loss of values in a shattered moral order or perverted in his attempts to realign that order along the lines of unsustained material realities. Shelley's poem is merely words to Father Socket, dead husks of sound aborted of all body and meaning. Likewise, Seton's assertion of freedom and beauty is actually a statement of lawlessness and moral indifference. Art therefore has been effectively stripped of the only truth which gave it form: the depth and extension of reality itself.

If art accedes to the disease of moral corruption in *The Bachelors*, religion too, as a repository of values, remains by no means inviolate. The general distortion of purpose and function which undermines the realm of artistic endeavor similarly threatens the definition of religious truth. In *The Bachelors*, as in many of Mrs. Spark's other novels, truth is explicitly incorporated within the Catholic experience, again not as rigid doctrinal exposition but as a general statement of a structured moral order. Just as Ronald Bridges is the man of vision in the novel, so too does he become the spokesman or medium for his religion. Directly opposed to Ronald's Catholicism, however, is the spiritualist cult, whose priest and prophet are Father Socket and Patrick Seton. In fact, Ronald says, "There are only two religions, the spiritualist and the Catholic."
When the summary nature of his statement is vigorously objected to, Mrs. Spark has him reply off-handedly, "You must take it in a figurative sense...or leave it, because I need a drink." (175)

In The Bachelors, spiritualism embodies that approach to reality which, while tacitly recognizing the nature of man's dilemma as a creature poised in tension between two worlds, the flesh and the spirit, nevertheless foregoes the responsibility of moral action demanded by both. The spiritualist fails to see that morality entails a painful structure of the two worlds. Malkoff indicates that Seton's failing "is his total commitment to the spiritual, his failure to develop a morality of the flesh taking into account the totality of human nature." 17 The leap to the spirit divorces him from all responsibility in the material order so that freedom of the flesh becomes his watchword. Spiritualism then becomes the practice of materialism, using the physical to suit one's own needs. Pledging allegiance to the spirit, the spiritualist wallows in the flesh.

What had constituted a philosophy of gross materialism in her earlier novels now becomes a religion in The Bachelors, threatening to supplant the moral order represented by Ronald's Catholicism. The seance room becomes the new sanctuary—the Sanctuary of Light, or Lyte as one of the characters suggests, in which "a dim green light" (185) is kept burning. The words of the Gospel become a blasphemy
within its walls. Seton invokes the precepts of Christ in order to frighten Freda Flower from court procedures against him:

"Let the sister beware of false friends and materialistic advice. The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and loseth his soul!" (40)

Later it is in this tabernacle of evil that the Lord of Darkness speaks through the mouth of his servant.

The new ministry undergoes even further definition in the work of Father Socket who converts Mike Garland to "a religion and a Way of Life" (155) that elevates homosexuality and crime to a level of sanctity and holiness. Unlike Ronald Bridges, who is a frustrated priest, Father Socket is "a real priest,...ordained by no man-made bishop but by Fire and the Holy Ghost; and a range of brightly woven vestments was hung in a cupboard in his bedroom to prove it." (122) And when his disciple and lover is frightened lest the police uncover their criminal activities, Father Socket consoles him with words that once again echo the tone of the Gospel even as they pervert its message:

"All troubles are passing," said Father Socket. "My son, the fever of life will soon be over and gone. We will take this police enquiry in our stride. Do not be disturbed, Mike. Patrick Seton will be brought to trial, the Wider Infinity will be brought to disrepute, the Temple will be cleansed and we shall then take over the affairs of the Circle ourselves." (153)
When it comes time for the trial, however, Seton and Socket join forces in the name of spiritualism and all the deceit and infamy which are its by-laws. The trial thus adds a new urgency, a new desperation to the theme of The Bachelors. The conflict moves beyond the realm of the physical to engage the spiritual order itself in mortal struggle. For what is at stake is not only the life but the soul of Alice Dawes. It is her soul which Seton seeks to "liberate" by murder after the trial; it is her Faith in God for which the trial becomes a test.

The fact that Seton is convicted and Alice thus spared would seem to indicate another apparent victory for the forces of good in the novel, yet the conclusion of The Bachelors is, in Malkoff's words, "an uneasy one." The same evil activities for which Seton is imprisoned endure in essence as the practice of Martin Bowles, only now they are sanctioned within the framework of the law itself. At the moment of her salvation, Alice blindly denies God because He does not deliver her lover. The demons persist, driving Ronald to the midnight streets of the city in a desperate effort to define and exorcise them. An expert in forgery on all levels, he has discovered the lie in Seton's vision of lawless freedom as well as in his handwriting. In a fallen world, truth still resides in union between the spiritual and physical orders, but a union that is enigmatically sealed in conflict and consummated in
sacrifice. What troubles Ronald, even as it sustains him, is the realization that "The Christian economy seems...to be so ordered that original sin is necessary to salvation." (88) It is not as Malkoff would imply, that his effort "to incorporate deceit and evil into a coherent vision of divine order" does not wholly succeed. If anything, it succeeds too well. For Ronald sees a world governed by apparent contradictions in which good is defined by evil, love proven in rejection, and unity of being achieved through loneliness. This is the unnatural world of the Christian, where salvation of the spirit entails suffering of the body, where spiritual love demands physical denial, where the man of vision is alone with his awareness and cursed with his responsibility. Ronald teaches Elsie Forrest the way of such a world when he counsels her about the commitments it exacts and the meager consolations it confers:

"The best type of love to give is sacrificial....The best type of love you can receive is to be taken for granted as a dependable person and otherwise ignored--that's more comfortable." (169)

Persevering in his own vocation as an epileptic, Ronald is caught up as medium and tortured priest between the two realms of experience, secure in neither and unfulfilled in both. In a very real sense, as the novel's conclusion indicates, the demonology which assails him springs from the failed marriage of the spiritual and physical which he sees as underlying the whole moral order. Unity of vision per-
ceives only disparity of values, the conflict between which produces that lonely state of bachelorhood which is the plight of human nature itself. Ronald walks the streets in the pain of awareness, measuring the night.

The Bachelors affords a vision of reality that is glimpsed, in the words of St. Paul (a favorite of Ronald Bridges), through a glass darkly. More than in any of her preceding novels, Mrs. Spark here concentrates on the dark night of the soul in a depraved and violent physical order. In order to delineate the dual nature of reality, she again gives physical form to supernatural reality, but with more terrifying implications than before. While the typist in The Comforters and the telephone caller in Memento Mori served, like Dougal Douglas in Peckham Rye, to intensify a realization of the extended depths to reality, the voice which slithers through the lips of Patrick Seton sounds the terror and struggle which such a realization entails. For the spiritual and physical are at war in The Bachelors as are the forces of good and evil, and the two conflicts become almost synonymous, leaving man on the brink of an impossible universe, tied to a flesh he must abjure and a soul he cannot free.

Nearly dualistic in its concept, Mrs. Spark's view of reality nevertheless manages to avoid the extremes such a stance would precipitate. Man's dilemma is not one of fate, but of commitment to a moral order that has lost its
place in the modern world. The sterility of the modern spirit stems precisely from the fact that not only has man lost all sense of lasting values but he has also grown unaware of his loss. Recovery of vision therefore discovers the truth of a divided order while commitment through sacrifice weds the spiritual and physical in the only real marriage possible, a union of struggle and suffering from which alone can be born the rewards of heaven, the last of the Four Last Things.

After The Bachelors, Mrs. Spark no longer uses the supernatural as an intrusive, active influence in the definition of reality. The conflict between good and evil, given its ultimate embodiment in the voice which speaks through Seton, is no longer conveyed through external forces but is centered within man himself. (In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Sandy sees not the Snake but the creeping disorder man has wrought upon himself and his world.) The Fall remains the central fact of man's experience, rendering alien the very realm in which he moves and cursing him to the responsibility of moral commitment. Thus Mrs. Spark chooses to close the novel with night settling over Ronald Bridges and the city of bachelors. Dawn may be forthcoming, but now is the night and its loneliness. Ronald knows truth. He sees the darkness.

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The freshness and exuberance of life in a hostel for
young women might at first seem a striking contrast to the oppressive night world of lonely bachelors. Yet The Girls of Slender Means is actually a reappraisal of the dark truths bared by The Bachelors and an intensification of their implacable presence. In the light of youth and beauty is discovered the same abyss of moral horror that yawned in the wake of Patrick Seton and Father Socket, only now extending beyond the confines of a single city to encompass a whole world in its violence and corruption. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie had traced the oncoming of experience in the lives of young girls still at play in the Garden of innocence, but what was stressed with Edenic nostalgia was the period of youth and its accompanying ingenuousness. Evil intruded upon the scene from outside forces, namely Miss Brodie and the approaching war. In The Girls of Slender Means, however, the evil is intrinsic to the setting. There is a very literal bomb in the garden of the May of Teck Club, and the war itself, whose early ominous rumblings were echoed in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, is about to consummate its course. The young school girls give way to young women who are endeavoring, one way or another, to make their way in the world. Times have changed, as has perspective, a fact Mrs. Spark suggests early in the novel when she refers to the founding of the Club, a residence for young girls living away from home and
seeking employment in London, as having taken place "at some remote and innocent Edwardian date." Nor are its members much akin to the wide-eyed innocents of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. They are at home in London, the city of bachelors, and in Mrs. Spark's words there were "few people alive at the time who were more delightful, more ingenious, more movingly lovely, and, as it might happen, more savage than the girls of slender means." (6)

Her seventh novel is one of Muriel Spark's most closely compact and experimental thus far. George Greene also calls it her most "unrelenting." As in the novels immediately preceding and following it, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie and The Mandelbaum Gate, Mrs. Spark uses frequent flashbacks and time lapses in her narrative to stress the rich complexities of motive and circumstance surrounding a central action rather than concentrate on the action itself. Once again her theme is vision, the discovery by an individual, in this case Nicholas Farringdon, of the true nature of reality and the moral order which informs it. Yet The Girls of Slender Means is no mere recapitulation of those central conflicts between good and evil, the spiritual and the physical, formulated by Mrs. Spark in her previous novels. This disquieting novel about beauty and its accompanying terror brings to a frightening resolution, and in literal and realistic terms, the struggle of the man of vision to maintain truth and integrity in a world which recognizes
neither and destroys both. What was a "vision of disorder" in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* now becomes an explicit "vision of evil" (174) given body not by a supernatural medium as in *The Bachelors* but by a young and beautiful girl. Moreover, the demands of vision, grown more and more stringent throughout the other novels, are finalized in *The Girls of Slender Means* as nothing less than suffering and death. Jean Taylor, Ronald Bridges, and Sandy Stranger all withdrew in their own way, at a cost of increasing sacrifice, from contact with a morally diseased society. Like another Stranger, Nicholas is also driven to the religious life, but with more disturbing results. Behind her convent grille, Sandy is still able to formulate *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and thus win fame and reputation, no matter how unsolicited. More important, the expression which she gives to reality endures within her work itself. Nicholas' *The Sabbath Notebooks*, however, remains unpublished. The letter dies, in a sense, and so does he—a martyr in the jungles of Haiti. The only reputation he achieves is that revived in the gossip of the former girls of slender means, who greet his final act with utter incomprehension or indifference. Nowhere in the previous novels has vision seemed more a sentence of condemnation than a release, just as never before has Mrs. Spark constructed such an insurmountable wall between the spiritual and physical orders of moral reality. Brought up to that wall
like a prisoner to his inflexible fate, the man of vision stands alone before a hostile world of material and physical values. Only through death can he find escape, salvation only through destruction.

At the heart of the novel is the May of Teck Club, his first encounter with which leaves Nicholas with "a poetic image that teased his mind and pestered him for details." (76) The shaping of that image defines the novel's theme. Entranced with the seemingly frivolous innocence of the girls and what he regards as their "beautiful heedless poverty," Nicholas at first views the Club "as a microcosmic ideal society." (76) To further ascertain for himself the special nature of its attraction, he cultivates the friendship and acquaintance of the girls who comprise it. Three especially govern his interests: Jane Wright, whom Nicholas depends upon for introductions to various members of the Club as well as for assistance in the publication of his book; Joanna Childe, "the poetic essence of tall, fair rectors' daughters," (22) in whom he discovers an austere and fragile innocence as well as "a sense of Hell;" (165) and beautiful Selina Redwood, with whom he sleeps. But the image he seeks does not materialize. The "vision of perfection" (113) to which he aspires eludes the frustrated "visionary," (112) a term Mrs. Spark uses explicitly for the first time in reference to one of her protagonists. Nicholas discovers that despite his efforts to shape this "miniature expression of
a free society" (103) to fit his own ideal, i.e., "an aesthetic and ethical conception of it, lovely frozen image that it was," (104) the May of Teck subsists only on its own basis. The realization that this is so

stirred his poetic sense to a point of exasperation, for...he discerned with irony the process of his own thoughts, how he was imposing upon this little society an image incomprehensible to itself. (85)

What fosters this incomprehension is the total lack of any set of legitimate ethics or aesthetics. The girls survive for themselves, at whatever cost. It is not until the end of the novel that the true image of the Club is clarified for Nicholas, when he becomes a witness of "that action of savagery so extreme that it forced him involuntarily to make an entirely unaccustomed gesture, the signing of the cross upon himself." (70) Up to that point, the reader, like Nicholas, is delighted by the carefree, uninhibited actions of the girls. Yet it should be remembered that Miss Brodie was similarly enchanting until Sandy discovered beneath the charm and plastic innocence a nature driven to destruction in the name of education. So too in The Girls of Slender Means, savagery is masked by loveliness, a point Mrs. Spark makes explicit at the beginning of the novel and illustrates concretely at the end before the astonished eyes of Nicholas Farringdon.

In the garden of the Club lies undetected a bomb from
the recent war. Its sudden explosion guts the building with fire and traps a number of the girls on the top floor, their only means of exit a very narrow window which opens onto an adjoining roof. Though most of them are unable to wedge their bodies through the aperture, Selina and two others do manage to make their escape, one losing her clothes and the other breaking her hip in the process. But Selina has no difficulty; in fact, the roof has served for some time as a trysting place for her and Nicholas. During the crisis, however, Nicholas, who is trying to comfort the remaining girls trapped inside until additional help arrives, suddenly sees Selina dart back through the window, apparently to assist one of the other girls. When she shortly emerges from the engulfing smoke with something in her arms, his first thought is that it must be a body. But Selina, "push[ing] her way through the girls" and "coughing delicately," (154) carries only an elegant Schiaparelli dress which has been passed among the girls as a common property for special occasions. This gently barbaric act, ignoring as it does the extreme plight of others to salvage a superficial ornament of only fashionable value, strips away all illusions from Nicholas' previous conceptions and constitutes an image not of beauty and innocence but of terror and holocaust. To Selina's question "Is it safe out here?" while she inspects the dress for damage, Nicholas can only
reply with the truth vouchsafed by such a vision of the utter moral emptiness which underlies a crumbling physical and social order: "Nowhere's safe." (155)

If it takes the destruction of the May of Teck and the ugly heedlessness of Selina's rescue of the Schiaparelli dress to destroy Nicholas' ideal of a perfect society, Mrs. Spark nevertheless makes such spectacular actions seem natural and consistent within the framework of the novel itself. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the morally floundering order she portrays is its beguiling beauty. Thus she describes the girls who walk about in the garden so carefully tended by one of the older ladies still in residence at the Club:

Only the youngest and happiest could walk on the grass with comfort; they were not greatly given to scruples and consideration for others, by virtue of their unblighted spirits. (94)

"Unblighted spirits" might at first seem indicative of a fresh and youthful innocence, but what Mrs. Spark actually links that carefree exuberance to is a destructive lack of concern for the values of others. The garden in which they tread, its bomb secreted away and waiting, is an obvious contrast to the original Garden of innocence. The metaphor is a favorite of Mrs. Spark which she used to the same effect in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. Yet the theme of that novel was the destruction of innocence, and the guilt of experience invaded the realm of childhood, she repeatedly
suggested by her use of imagery, as the Snake polluted Eden. In *The Girls of Slender Means*, however, evil and destruction already abide in the garden, and those who reside there, unlike the Brodie set, have already tasted experience to the core.

Blinded by his ideals—he once remarks to Jane Wright "that it was lovely having nothing to do but dream beautiful dreams all the day long" (121)—Nicholas discovers the truth about the Club only in an illuminating conflagration. Throughout the novel, however, Mrs. Spark subtly defines the internal shallowness masked by external beauty, even as the bomb is concealed in a hollow of the garden. Malkoff correctly sees the Schiaparelli dress as the clearest symbolic statement "of the superficial, the showy, the glittering facade that often covers a moral void." Like Commandments issued from the source of that void in order to give it social form, Selina's Sentences, intoned every morning and evening as regularly as a Church Office, ring through the Club to be heeded with respect, envy, and "savage joy." (58) In order to help maintain her poise as a working woman, Selina, who has taken a course in the subject, is advised to recite the sentences aloud twice a day:

Poise is perfect balance, an equanimity of body and mind, complete composure whatever the social scene. Elegant dress, immaculate grooming, and perfect deportment all contribute to the attainment of self-confidence. (57)
And she is an apt student of poise, as Nicholas later discovers on the roof. Just before the explosion, he is rushing across the roof to assist one of the girls who has got stuck in the window when, Mrs. Spark carefully remarks, he stumbles over a rug on which he and Selina used to sleep together, "recover[s] his balance, and then falls "flat on his face." (139) Selina, however, slithering through the window with her prize, is the epitome of self-possession, drawing from Mrs. Spark the wry observation: "Poise is perfect balance. It was the Schiaparelli dress. The coat hanger dangled from the dress like a headless neck and shoulders." (154)

Such is the essence of the girls of slender means, a desiccating beauty plucked bare of substance or value. Love becomes for them either a pleasant trifle or a means to an end, promiscuity an accepted code, and marriage a handy convenience. Selina again, the envy of all, sleeps happily with Colonel Dobell, a married man, and has "another man-friend, a business-man of thirty-five, still in the Army, very wealthy, not weak," whom she plans to marry "eventually." Meanwhile, however, watching Nicholas in a "mad sequence" of conversation with the Colonel, she "thought she could use him." (88) Dorothy Markham, who is characterized as an incessant "waterfall of debutante chatter," unabashedly announces to Jane Wright the news of her
hastily contrived marriage: "Filthy luck. I'm preggers. Come to the wedding." (50) Social grace, a veneer of respectability and fashion, glosses over the displaced values of human love and human dignity, which are the necessary components of responsible awareness. Not only is this masking of commitment thoughtless, but it is basically dangerous as well. Dorothy, whose diminutive size would normally have permitted her easy access through the window onto the roof, is prevented at the time of the explosion by her swelling pregnancy. Usually, however, the destruction bred of such values as those which permeate the May of Teck is directed at those innocent of its corruption. Dorothy does finally make it to safety with Selina, while the only one who perishes is Joanna Childe, whom Baldanza aptly describes as "preternaturally innocent" and whose very name, as Malkoff indicates, suggests innocence itself. Nicholas, whose recovery of balance after tripping over the vestiges of his and Selina's lovemaking could be an intimation of his repudiation of their past and his move toward affirmative renewal, falls flat on his face as the bomb rocks the building. Brought low by the blast, he is soon further withered by the sight of Selina's terrifying poise and later finally destroyed in the jungles by a savagery perhaps not so distant from that he has already known.

It is precisely because of the enduring presence of evil and barbarity as triumphant forces in a hostile, explosive
world that The Girls of Slender Means remains thus far Mrs. Spark's most extreme indictment of the modern moral order. Though the May of Teck is destroyed, the girls who are its offspring proceed quite well upon the paths and lives they have mapped out for themselves. Neither is Mrs. Spark's vision limited to this one artificial society, for she takes within her compass the world itself. Renata Adler points out the elaborate parallelism which structures the novel as a parable on the state of modern society. Opening as it does with VE Day and closing with VJ Day, the theme might seem to stress peace and concord as natural possibilities; but the conclusion of the novel also includes mention of the atom bomb, the reality of which, remarks Joanna Childe's father, "leaves one breathless with horror." (167) Not just concerned with a girls' club destroyed by one small German bomb, Adler concludes, The Girls of Slender Means has for its subject "a larger Society which lives with the unacknowledged threat of a larger, more ominous Bomb concealed in its garden."26

The same corrupt values which underlie the May of Teck permeate the outside world to an even more extreme degree. The celebration of VE Day concludes on a night of diverse and haphazard couplings with the usual unexpected results:

Many strange arms were twined round strange bodies. Many liaisons, some permanent, were formed in the night, and numerous infants of experimental variety, delightful in hue of skin
and racial structure, were born to the world in the due cycle of nine months after. (16)

While it might be urged that such excesses can be at least partially condoned because of the fever of the moment, Mrs. Spark seems unwilling to excuse the exercise of love as a random accident with "experimental" consequences. The evening of festivities, she remarks, "was something between a wedding and funeral on a world scale." (16) Appropriately, similar carousings mark VJ night on which the novel ends, but Nicholas also witnesses a murder in the huge throng crowded before the royal Palace. Unnoticed "in the general pandemonium" except by Nicholas, a seaman "slid a knife silently between the ribs of a woman who was with him." (174-175) Love is literally destroyed by a meaningless act of violence amid the rejoicings of peace. The implications are, as in the case of the May of Teck, that the ideals of love, beauty, and innocence are mere illusions or passing vagaries in a world that thrives on their opposites. Mrs. Spark concludes her account of the joys of peace and triumph as Nicholas and his friends walk back home:

They walked back through the clear air of the Park, stepping round the couples who lay locked together in their path. The Park was filled with singing. Nicholas and his companions sang too. They ran into a fight between British and American servicemen. Two men lay unconscious at the side of the path, being tended by their friends. The crowds cheered in the distance, behind them. A formation of aircraft
buzzed across the night sky. It was a glorious victory. (176)

The vision which governs *The Girls of Slender Means* is dark and unsparring. Mrs. Spark reiterates a number of themes common to her earlier novels but now grown more extreme and drastic. The developing role of violence in the novels culminates in the destruction of the May of Teck, the deaths of Nicholas and Joanna, and the universal conflagration of war. The presence of evil in the world as an active force, intimated in the prior novels by Mrs. Spark's concern with diabolism and her frequent use of satanic imagery, is explicitly realized in *The Girls of Slender Means*. Joanna's shock at the modern deterioration of the original spirit of the May of Teck moves her to quote the Scriptures: "He rageth, and again he rageth, because he knows his time is short." Repeated twice, the statement draws only laughter from the other girls, most of whom, Mrs. Spark tells us, did not know "that this was a reference to the devil." (9) Earlier, Joanna had been strongly influenced by a young preacher who, emphasizing the positive nature of self-sacrifice, declared from the pulpit, "Hell, of course,...is a negative concept." (25) His rhetoric of reassurance, however, is immediately undercut by Mrs. Spark's remark that "he was as yet inexperienced in many respects, although he later learned some reality as an Air Force chaplain." (26) Reality is hell, and hell is the evil of here and now that
comprises the utter negation of a moral order. Trying to articulate the unique quality of Joanna's character, Nicholas says of her after her death: "Joanna had religious strength....She had a sense of Hell. She told a friend of hers that she was afraid of Hell." (165) Nicholas shares her fears after discovering reality for himself during the burning of the May of Teck. Unable to visit Selina after the fire without driving her to hysterics, he speculates with Jane Wright about her behavior:

"I got a fright from her last time."
"Have you found her then!" said Jane.
"Yes, but she's suffering from shock.
I must have brought all the horrors back to her mind."
"It was hell," Jane said.
"I know." (173)

Seething with latent violence and wearing evil as nonchalantly as a smile or a dress, the girls of slender means typify the insane sense of values which has uprooted the moral order. Since madness is its own best portrait, Mrs. Spark illustrates her theme of a berserk reality with the character of Pauline Fox, a resident of the May of Teck who indulges in a romantic fantasy with Jack Buchanan which she substantiates with fictitious dates and tales of lovers' quarrels. Though insanity had played a minor part in some of the earlier novels, notably The Comforters, The Ballad of Peckham Rye, Memento Mori, and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Mrs. Spark emphasizes its definitive role in The Girls of Slender Means. While he is waiting downstairs for Selina,
Nicholas encounters Pauline returning from one of her make-believe engagements with Jack Buchanan:

A girl in a long evening dress slid into the doorway, furtively. Her hair fell round her shoulders in a brown curl. Through the bemused mind of the loitering, listening man went the fact of a girl slipping furtively into the hall; she had a meaning, even if she had no meaningful intention. (106)

The dress she wears is, of course, the Schiaparelli; and as Selina descends the stairs which mad Pauline has just climbed, Mrs. Spark blends the two for a moment in a composite pose of identical realities:

It might have been the same girl, floating upwards in a Schiaparelli rustle of silk with a shining hood of hair, and floating downwards in a slim skirt with a white-spotted blue blouse, her hair now piled high. (109)

Beauty and madness: artificial Selina going out with a man she uses and false Pauline who embodies love as the fiction it is. The meaning is as clear as the Schiaparelli. And later, as the fire rages, it is no surprise that, along with Selina, the only girl who can easily maneuver herself through the window and thus on to the roof and safety is Pauline Fox.

The most disturbing aspect of The Girls of Slender Means is this persistent emphasis on the endurance of evil, irrationality, and corruption at the expense of innocence and vision, most directly reflected in the deaths of Joanna
Childe and Nicholas Farringdon. Baldanza, for instance, who doesn't care much for Nicholas, deeming him "a wastrel poet" subject to "cantankerousness and eccentricity," is nevertheless horrified at Joanna's end: "If anything about the climax is more repellent than the event itself, it is the idea that brute chance can play such a capricious role in human affairs." Baldanza's failure to account for the role of spiritual and moral awareness in Mrs. Spark's novels negates his charge of blind chance as the inimical force, yet his uneasiness that such sacrifices are exacted is certainly understandable, particularly given the uncompromising nature of the vision which sustains the novel. In *The Girls of Slender Means* Mrs. Spark brings to a full-bodied definition the implacable terms of the conflict between the spiritual and the physical and reveals in their most unalleviated forms the demands of moral awareness and commitment, here fully realized in what have been, throughout the other novels as well, her two major recurring considerations: love and art.

Marriage as a means of natural fulfillment in the physical order has been a constant ideal in Mrs. Spark's novels but, from the first, a frustrated ideal as well. Her heroes and heroines seem to have found the possibility of sexual happiness progressively incompatible with the realities of the moral order thrust upon them. Entirely consistent with this developing viewpoint, therefore, is the fact that in
The Bachelors and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Ronald Bridges, though deprived of the religious vocation he desires, still adopts celibacy as an order of life while Sandy Stranger assumes the vows of a contemplative nun. The role of art undergoes a similar change. It is a far cry from The Comforters, in which the process of art is linked to the discovery of vision and the heroine is herself a novelist, to The Bachelors, where the hero is only a handwriting expert and the artists are either failures or perverts. Art, like love, is an inadequate force to meet the hard truths of reality. Sandy Stranger must reject Miss Brodie and her artistic ideals, as well as her own artist lover, in order to turn to psychology, religion, and The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.

For Joanna Childe and Nicholas Farringdon, the realization of love and the reality of art prove similarly insufficient or impossible in the context of the moral truth they discern. Joanna's concept of love is based entirely on poetic ideals. Mrs. Spark notes that "All her ideas of honour and love came from the poets,"28 who apparently support "the notion that a nice girl should only fall in love once in her life." (23) Consequently, when she discovers in herself affection for a young curate on the same order as that which she felt for his predecessor, she feels "the whole structure of love and marriage, the whole philos-
ophy of Shakespeare's sonnet" in threat of being undermined. Her response is strikingly like Miss Brodie's, but more innocent. Repressing her feelings, she "worked them off in tennis and the war effort." (23)

But it is not poetry alone which molds Joanna's character. Her religious upbringing as the daughter of an Anglican clergyman causes her to be "vaguely acquainted with distinctions and sub-distinctions of human and divine love, and their various attributes...." (23) This acquaintance is brought to a new level of awareness during a sermon by the minister to whom, in spite of herself, she feels sexually drawn. In reference to St. Paul's text calling for the removal of an offensive member of the body rather than condemnation to hell, the preacher interprets the passage as requiring the sacrifice of that "which we hold most precious" should it prove a "stumbling-block" to one's entry to heaven. For, he concludes, "It is better to enter maimed into the Kingdom of Heaven than not to enter at all." (25-26) Joanna takes him at his word and repudiates sexual love, that which is most precious. Mrs. Spark states the terms of the sacrifice most succinctly: "Joanna, then, had decided to enter maimed into the Kingdom of Heaven." (26)

Nicholas finally makes the same decision, but his instructor, unlike Joanna's, is experience. In a state of ambivalence most of his life resulting from an uncertain
quest for a shadowy ideal, Nicholas plumbs a variety of extremes in search of his goal, including affairs with both men and women, the contemplation of suicide, and "an equally drastic course of action known as Father D'Arcy," (61) a Jesuit philosopher who specializes in the conversion of English intellectuals. The sexual expert, he is still unable to find in the mere physical sensation of love the compensation he seeks. Sex becomes a means to an end which constantly eludes him. When he sleeps with Selina, it is "with the aim of converting her soul" and "awakening... her social conscience." (112-113) The bed is not equal to the task, he discovers with increasing exasperation, even as the May of Teck is not up to his image of it. The latter collapses before his eyes in a holocaust of fire and the former, like Joanna's stumbling-block, he trips over before rising to the vision of horrible truth. From the roof he will descend to the jungle--again like Joanna, to be literally maimed and destroyed.

In this context alone, Nicholas' renunciation of sex may at first seem less a sacrifice than a natural consequence of self-awareness. That is, given the fact that he has engaged in sex, not love, a realization of the emptiness of the act might in itself be enough to cancel any value or worth for him. Since he loses nothing, he actually gives up nothing. In a similar vein, Joanna's self-imposed celibacy seems questionable by reason of her naive understanding
of the Scriptures, her sheltered religious background, and her assumption of ideals every bit as unreal as Nicholas'. Taken singly, therefore, the actions of both Nicholas and Joanna might be interpreted as gestures of either experienced indifference or futile innocence.

Such, however, is not Mrs. Spark's intention. The relationship between Joanna and Nicholas is intrinsic to the novel nor can their individual roles be fully appreciated except as complementary to one another. Renata Adler concludes her list of motifs in the book with reference to the parallel deaths of Joanna and Nicholas. They are further linked together by a common sense of spiritual awareness and a mutual appreciation of poetry. Nicholas is the only one to discern the true nature of Joanna's commitment to poetry, and so taken is he with the power and depth of her delivery that he tries to capture its essence on tape by recording her rendition of "The Wreck of the Deutschland." On one level, he perceives in her voice an "orgiastical... feeling for poetry" which betrays the fact that "Poetry takes the place of sex for her." (97) At the same time that he wishes to correct her misguided energies, however, he also realizes that it is the pure innocence of that latent sexuality which gives her power and character. Once tapped by experience, the ideal vanishes, the informing spirit banished by the reality of the physical:

Joanna needs to know more life,
thought Nicholas, ... but if she
knew life she would not be pro-
claiming these words so sexually
and matriarchally as if in the
ecstatic art of suckling a divine
child. (104)

Sexuality and spirituality form a common bond in the
Childe of innocence. Mrs. Spark's ideal of the physical
and spiritual meeting in a fulfilling union of realities is
almost realized in Joanna. Nicholas too finally understands
that it is this quality of impossible beauty and happiness
in Joanna that he has sought so unavailingly in the May of
Teck. In fact, Mrs. Spark implies that it is Joanna, not
Selina, whom he loves. Conversing with another of the girls
after his death, Jane Wright, who has never understood a
thing about Nicholas, debunks the notion of Joanna's influ-
ence upon him: "But he wasn't in love with Joanna, he was
in love with Selina." (173) Since Mrs. Spark has already
demonstrated that it was not so much love as it was cur-
iosity that motivated Nicholas in regard to Selina, even
after the fire, Jane's remark might be read as an unwitting
affirmation of the very thing she denies.

Regardless of the exact nature of his conscious feel-
ings, it is Joanna whom Nicholas admires most and whose loss,
intensified even further by the destruction of her record-
ing, defines his own direction after conversion. As Joanna
had "a sense of Hell," so too Nicholas discovers evil. The
result is the same: withdrawal from the physical and ulti-
mate destruction by the same.

Vision then negates the possibility of love because it perceives a physical order in which such a concept is no longer valid. Reality destroys ideals, of which love is the most dominant. Though the growing division between spiritual and physical values was well documented in the two preceding novels, especially as it affected the lives and happiness of Ronald Bridges and Sandy Stranger, the bare statement of that reality, recognizing the absolute impossibility of union between the two orders, is given in its most unmitigated form in *The Girls of Slender Means*. There was a marriage, however ambiguous its details, at the end of *The Bachelors*, and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* included, toward its end, a fleeting reverie of the joy of sexual awareness. The present novel, however, offers no such remission. Vision renders the individual an outcast in the world since he can no longer subscribe to its values or its goals. The inevitable outcome is his destruction. Such an allegiance is, of course, madness in the eyes of the world, as Mrs. Spark demonstrates in the various uncomprehending reactions to Nicholas' martyrdom. A similar response meets the rejection of sexual happiness as incompatible with spiritual commitment. Collie and Greggie, two elderly spinsters who have become permanent fixtures at the May of Teck, are engaging in one of their habitual arguments when the topic of sex and free love is suddenly introduced by
Nicholas, apparently for its shock value. Blithely unaffected, however, Collie, who is going through a religious phase, says of his remarks:

"He isn't trying to shock us. He's very realistic. If one is growing in grace--I would go so far as to say when one has grown in grace--one can take realism, sex and so forth in one's stride."

Linking together sex and marriage, she concludes that while "there's a lot to be said for marriage,...if you never have it you never miss it." To which Greggie invokes Freud for proof of the biological necessity of sex and the effects of its loss:

"You're quite wrong there, Collie. One does miss sex. The body has a life of its own. We do miss what we haven't had, you and I. Biologically. Ask Sigmund Freud. It is revealed in dreams. The absent touch of the warm limbs at night, the absent--"

Interrupted for the sake of propriety, she caps the argument with a "thrust at Collie's religiosity." "The Beatific Vision," she submits, "does not appear to me to be an adequate compensation for what we miss." (127-129)

Greggie's is the standard secular rebuttal to the religious ascetic, arguing complacently for the superiority of the present over the uncertainty of the future. Her vindictive jab at spiritual values is relatively harmless, but what is disturbing, particularly in the total context of the novel, is the fact that her evaluation of the role
of sex in life is absolutely correct, as Mrs. Spark demonstrates with Joanna's reading of poetry. Sex is natural, even necessary, to the physical order, and its repression does result in a serious imbalance or loss on that same plane. Yet neither is Collie entirely wrong, for with grace or vision one is able to see that sacrifice has its place and loss its value. As in Mrs. Spark's other novels, reality is two-dimensional and vision reveals a terrible truth: hell is on earth in the unnatural life of the Christian. Heaven as always must remain a distant promise, rarely if ever voiced, the very last of the Four Last Things.

What Mrs. Spark details in The Girls of Slender Means is a world in which innocence and truth are destroyed by the triumph of hypocrisy and violence. Even the recognition of a Christian context does not completely allay the sense of dread attendant upon the apparent injustice of such a scheme. To an even greater degree than The Bachelors, confesses George Greene, The Girls of Slender Means "admits the impossibility of explaining in strictly rational, human terms most of those discrepancies which the 'vigilant manipulator' allows." 30

Karl Malkoff looks to the novel itself for a concrete image of the divine order and finds it in Joanna's recitation of "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

As in Hopkins' great poem, there is no humanly understandable ethical
system implicit in catastrophe; man's relation to God cannot be systematized, but must be experienced by the individual who transcends all attempts to rationalize divinity. 31

Numerous critics besides Malkoff have indicated the importance of the poem to the novel, but none have examined it in any real depth. Yet it is Hopkins' vision of a God of terror and brutal strength which Mrs. Spark uses to support her own. Both, in Malkoff's words, are "terrible." 32

If the ways of God seemed either insane or manipulative in the previous novels, Mrs. Spark, like Hopkins, now finds them suggestive of the remorseless hunter. Within the same stanza, the poet had hailed the Lord as "thou Orion of light" and "Thou martyr-master," 33 for it is He who exacts of the tall nun her suffering. Similarly, Mrs. Spark waits until the bomb has exploded and the drama on the rooftop is unfolding to recall that Nicholas and Selina's lovemaking had taken place on the same spot, "under Orion's Belt and the Plough, which constituted the only view in Greater London that remained altogether intact." (148-149) Linked together by implication are the earlier act of uncommitted love and the present holocaust by the light of which Nicholas discovers evil as the very thing he made love to. The Hunter is the witness of both events and the Plough, which calls to mind a famous image in Hopkins' other great poem "The Windhover," the means by which He sows the seeds of vision. Marvelling at the courage and ability of a small
bird in challenging the awesome power of the wind, Hopkins suggests that it is from such actions as entail the greatest sacrifice and effort that "the fire...breaks...a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!" He concludes his argument with two concrete examples:

No wonder of it; sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion. 34

Dedicated by Hopkins to Christ, "The Windhover," like "The Wreck of the Deutschland," reveals his vision of the Christian mystery as one entailing destruction for salvation and sacrifice for reward. The tall nun who dies, the earth which is trodden down and broken by the plough, and the smoldering coals which shatter into fragments: all reveal a hidden beauty born of their immolation. The deaths of Joanna and Nicholas are on the same order. Mrs. Spark puts the argument a bit differently, however, when she has Nicholas, who corresponds to Hopkins reflecting on the nun's death, write in his notebook after the fire, "...a vision of evil may be as effective to conversion as a vision of good." (174)

"The Windhover" and "The Wreck of the Deutschland" are both relatively early Hopkins and express the poet's wonder and praise at discovery of the Christian reality. Though he does perceive the paramount role of suffering in this order, it is not until the late sonnets that he actually
realizes the sheer weight of its burden. Then the poems no longer address God as "chevalier" or, in the concluding words of "the Deutschland,"

    Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,  
    Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts'  
    chivalry's thron'g Lord.\textsuperscript{35}

In his agony, the poet now importunes his Creator as "sir" and "thou Terrible," crying for relief or some sign of encouragement--"send my roots rain."\textsuperscript{36}

It is the imagery of the early Hopkins which helps structure the novel, but it is the terror of the later Hopkins which modulates the tone. God is exceedingly remote in The Girls of Slender Means, as distant as Orion in the heavens. Yet the machinery of the Christian reality goes on, and the Christian surrenders to the destruction which is his due. Nowhere is the seemingly inexplicable nature of this order more terrifyingly evoked than when Joanna prepares to record "The Wreck of the Deutschland." One of the girls, Mrs. Spark reports, "snorted a suppressed laugh. Otherwise there was silence but for the quiet purr of the machine waiting for Joanna." (131) Later, near the conclusion of the novel, Nicholas consoles himself for the loss of the recording with the realization that Joanna's father, for whom he had intended to play it, "had never seen the reality of his daughter" and "might not have
recognized Joanna in the Deutschland." (164) As if to give solid evidence of that reality, Mrs. Spark immediately quotes the following lines from the line:

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a, where was a place? (165)

On earth, Nicholas and Joanna learn, there is no place.

Like love, which is of the physical order, art as a means of redemption or, in Malkoff's words, "of transcending the limits of the human condition," is unavailing in The Girls of Slender Means. Though he feels otherwise, Malkoff's claim that Joanna's frequent recitation of "Adonis" and "Ode to the West Wind" would seem to intimate a way of transience "for the poet-prophet" simply has no substance in the general scheme of the novel. For one thing, these poems are alluded to no more frequently than Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," Blake's "Ah! Sun-flower," and others. In the first of these alone, Mrs. Spark's reference to the passage on Chatterton with its conclusion--"We Poets in our youth begin in gladness; / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness," (48)--discounts his theory. Taken in its proper context, "Ode to the West Wind" is also ironic, even as it was in The Bachelors. Shelley's mighty invocation--"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: / What if my leaves are falling like its own! / The tumult of thy mighty harmonies" (136)--is pronounced by Joanna only moments before
the bomb explodes. The plea to "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!" (137) is answered by her death, the only one who had given any substance to the poetry. The negation is further confirmed by the destruction of her tape recording as well.

Neither is Mrs. Spark as fortuitous in the scattering of poems throughout the novel as Kermode suggests. Drinkwater's "Moonlit Apples," snatches of which recur frequently, seems to suggest a fantasy of Edenic innocence later destroyed by the crude reality of the bomb. No coincidence is it that "At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows /....those moonlit apples of dreams," (59-60) for it is on the roof that truth and experience destroy all dreams. Blake's sunflower, "weary of time," is a presage of doom in the physical order as well as an expression of longing for "that sweet golden clime / Where the traveller's journey is done." (65) Fittingly enough, it is only the first line with its declaration of weariness that Mrs. Spark chooses to emphasize by repetition. Finally, the inclusion of Arnold's lament about "The sea of faith" and "Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" (96) clearly sustains one of the basic themes in the novel.

All of these poems are illustrative of Mrs. Spark's theme, but as Kermode stresses, "most relevant to the crisis is 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' and the Anglican liturgy
proper to the day of disaster." While the first clearly embodies the central conflict in the novel between spiritual and physical values and defines the commitments of vision, it remains a work of art and hence insufficient in itself to the fulfillment of those commitments. Like all the other poems uttered by Joanna, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" perishes with her. Moreover, apart from that poetry to which she alone gives meaning and Nicholas application, art grows corrupt in a perverse world. Jane Wright tries to gather the autographs of famous writers, which she will later sell, by means of fake letters requesting sympathetic responses. The publisher for whom she works operates on a policy of intimidation "in order to achieve the minimum resistance, if not the total collapse, of the author" (44) and therefore assure the most meager of contracts. His great success thus far is The Symbolism of Louisa May Alcott, a best seller "in certain quarters, since it had a big lesbian theme." (46) For a while, Nicholas himself seeks the same publisher for his Sabbath Notebooks, a collection of philosophical pensees, with the help of a forged letter of critical praise. Both book and letter are later abandoned.

While still an aspiring writer, however, Nicholas takes Jane Wright to a poetry reading featuring a number of his friends. Mrs. Spark's description of their efforts and their futures is most revealing:
The poets read their poems, two each, and were applauded. Some of these poets were to fail and fade into a no-man's-land of Soho public houses in a few years' time, and become the familiar messes of literary life. Some, with many talents, faltered, in time, from lack of stamina, gave up and took a job in advertising or publishing, detesting literary people above all. Others succeeded and became paradoxes; they did not always continue to write poetry, or even poetry exclusively.

Ernest Claymore, for instance, will become "a mystical stockbroker" and publish "three short books of philosophy which everyone could easily understand indeed." Furthermore, Mrs. Spark notes, he will spend

his weekdays urgently in the City, three week-ends each month at his country cottage—an establishment of fourteen rooms, where he ignored his wife and, alone in his study wrote Thought—and one week-end a month in retreat at a monastery. (73-74)

Jane Wright, whose business is "the world of books," (40) will become a gossip columnist.

The elements are by now familiar components in Mrs. Spark's novels. Art either fails or is debased in a world to which it is no longer suited. The monastery becomes one retreat, Nicholas' jungle another. The epigraph of The Sabbath Notebooks—"The Sabbath was made for Man, not Man for the Sabbath" (62)—does not withstand the complacent order of values it suggests and Nicholas discovers in Selina's savage act. When, on VJ night, he sees the seaman stab his companion, Nicholas suddenly thrusts the forged
letter so essential to the book's publication down the sea-
man's blouse. In Malkoff's words, he thus "repudiates a way
of life; he rejects a clever and aphoristic, and therefore
distorted and oversimplified, interpretation of reality.
And since the letter is false, he is also rejecting moral
duplicity, hypocritical posing, superficial values."41

What remain are truth and death among the other savages
in Haiti. Nothing avails beside vision in The Girls of
Slender Means unless it be the prayer Joanna intones at the
moment of her death. Amid the girls huddled around her,
she herself stood as one hypnotized in-
to the strange utterances of Day 27 in
the Anglican order, held to be applica-
table to all sorts and conditions of human
life in the world at that particular mo-
ment, when in London homing workers plodded
across the Park, observing with curiosity
the fire-engines in the distance...and
elsewhere on the face of the globe people
slept, queued for liberation-rations, beat
the tom-toms, took shelter from the bombers
or went for a ride on a dodgem at the fun-
fair. (156)

The relevance is universal: to the war, to the savages, to
the indifferent. Yet the effect is even more frightening
since the plea seems to go unanswered for her who gives it
voice. The words of the psalm ring out as the other girls
climb to safety:

"So that they who go by say not so much as,
The Lord prosper you: we wish you good luck
in the name of the Lord.

Out of the deep I have called...." (160)

One of the last to ascend the ladder is a girl called Pippa,
whose name immediately calls to mind the heroine of Browning's play and her blithe proclamation that "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world." Pippa's cry to Joanna to grasp the ladder is futile, however, and the Childe of God crashes to her death along with the May of Teck in "a high heap of rubble." (161) Everything, it would hardly seem, is all right with the world.

Reality is terrifying in *The Girls of Slender Means*, and terror is truth. The night of *The Bachelors* descends upon a city and world governed by the savagery of the jungle. The wall between the physical and spiritual orders rears upward, creating for the Christian a hell of life and confirming the distance of God. It is the world of Job in agony that has now become Mrs. Spark's domain. Holocaust and sacrifice are still the same and still as inexplicable. Nowhere's safe.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. It is interesting in this regard to recall Mrs. Spark's earlier ironic suggestion by way of Matt O'Brien in Memento Mori that God is perhaps a blissful lunatic--or so His ways seem to men. Though George Greene, in "A Reading of Muriel Spark," devotes considerable discussion to the "ironies of God" in The Bachelors and The Girls of Slender Means, he does not take up this particular aspect of Memento Mori, probably because he prefers a more orthodox, less extreme approach to the question of Divine Providence than such a reading would allow. This is not to say that his essay is any way superficial. He even states, in regard to The Girls of Slender Means, that the "vigilant manipulator' of whom The Bachelors spoke is not above using what appear to be lunatic devices in order to prove His continuing presence." (Greene, p. 406) The general tenor of the essay, however, suggests an even assurance and equanimity in Mrs. Spark's treatment of the theme that cannot be adequately justified by the progressively somber tone of the novels themselves. Not that Mrs. Spark's Faith is in question, only her sense of ease.

A far less reasonable approach to the same problem is that of Frank Baldanza in "Muriel Spark and the Occult." As was mentioned in the Introduction, he seems unable to grasp any subtleties in regard to Mrs. Spark's religious themes and thus substitutes "brute chance" (Baldanza, p. 201) for Greene's "ironies of God." His reading of the novels proves so limited as to be ineffective.

5. Hoyt, p. 131.

9. Malkoff, Spark, p. 27.

10. Schneider, p. 41.


27. Baldanza, p. 201.

28. Mrs. Spark specifically cites Shakespeare's Sonnet 116:
...Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove: (22)

35. Hopkins, p. 12.
41. Malkoff, Spark, p. 38.
CHAPTER V
OVER THE WALL: The Mandelbaum Gate

The Mandelbaum Gate is an anomaly in Muriel Spark's fiction, though not an altogether unpredictable one. Differing greatly in length, setting, and tone from the previous novels, it has garnered the dubious distinction of constantly being tabbed her "most ambitious" effort thus far. Warner Berthoff, in a lengthy essay dealing with Mrs. Spark and Iris Murdoch, claims that this is "her first proper novel," the earlier works having been "held down to novella length and...the subordinate forms of parable, extended anecdote, morality play." Despite his generally unfavorable reception of the book, Berthoff is nevertheless generous enough to note that Mrs. Spark "cannot be called unambitious" and that "with The Mandelbaum Gate--elaborate in design, brazenly artful in execution--she has staked out a bold claim to major critical recognition."¹ This from an adverse critic! Karl Malkoff, on the other hand, retains his usual even appraisal of her fiction with the succinct acknowledgment that The Mandelbaum Gate is indeed "the most complex, most ambitious of her novels."² Finally, Frank Kermode rounds out the perspective of critical response by calling attention to "the power and beauty of Mrs. Spark's most ambitious creation game." The Mandelbaum Gate, he
concludes magnificently, is

...in an age of rather clumsy argument about fiction, a demonstration that great things can be done when a strong imagination determines to take up many aspects of the "kind of truth" that fictions provide and bind them up in one volume.  

Ambition, it would thus seem, is to be denoted by complexity and length, undoubtedly the two most distinguishing features of the novel. More than twice the length of any of her previous novels with the possible exception of The Bachelors, The Mandelbaum Gate breaks away from the compact structures imposed by the author on her other fictive worlds to range over an extensive setting and explore an immense variety of personalities and relationships. After The Comforters, Mrs. Spark so structured her novels that action and character were unfolded within the confines of a carefully defined and deliberately limited milieu or setting. Her intention was to portray the workings of the moral order in society as well as in the individual, and since the former presents such an elusive identity--ultimately, society is the world itself--what better way to grasp it as a substantive entity than by reduction to a workable and observable microcosm. Such is the function of the tiny island of Robinson, the village of Peckham Rye, the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, and the May of Teck. In Memento Mori and The Bachelors the same effect is
achieved not so much through setting as by a unique set of identifying characteristics—common age and common bachelorhood—applicable to the individuals as a whole. The Comforters is the notable exception, largely because Mrs. Spark's concern is so immediately concentrated on Caroline Rose's relationship with the typist, or the artist with reality, rather than on her encounter with society. Consequently, the novel is peopled with a wide and varying assortment of characters whose function is to demonstrate the multiple possibilities of an extended reality. For The Comforters is early Muriel Spark, when vision is still wonder, not regret.

Yet society performs a similar function in The Mandelbaum Gate, defining reality in terms of diversity. Most of the action unfolds in the Holy Land, the very structure of which is informed by racial, spiritual, and political conflicts. Division is the immediate keynote of the land as well as of the novel: Arab and Jew, New Jerusalem and Old Jerusalem, native and English, Moslem and Christian. To further complicate the multiplicity, enter Barbara Vaughan, half-Jewish, half-English, and convert to Catholicism, who tries to unravel the mystery of her identity as an individual against a background of foreign intrigue, erotic splendor, and theological dispute. Her search for herself involves a pilgrimage not only across the country but into
the very consciousness of the Holy Land, there to discover in complexity the totality of awareness. Vision brings fulfillment to Barbara Vaughan on both orders of reality. She finds happiness in love and marriage while she discovers peace on the spiritual level, though not without a good deal of help from God and her author. Nevertheless, other than Caroline Rose, Barbara is alone in achieving what Malkoff calls "the unity of being frequently sought but rarely found in Miss Spark's novels."5

In order to effect such a resolution, the possibility of which has grown progressively distant and obscure in the other novels, it is not too surprising that Mrs. Spark returns to the atmosphere and tone of The Comforters to rekindle the promise which once gleamed inherent in a world of diverse realities. George Greene even sees a close relationship between the major characters of both novels, Barbara functioning, in a sense, as Caroline's "older sister."6 Both are converts to Catholicism who find their religion in the way of love and must struggle to accommodate themselves to the demands of a complex moral order. The spiritual does not impinge on the physical order in The Mandelbaum Gate with the uncanny persistence of Caroline's typist, yet Barbara is no less aware of the abiding process of supernatural reality given body by her Faith. The plots of each novel involve a ring of amiable smugglers who are as
blissfully sacrilegious as they are charming. Mrs. Jepp is redone in the image and likeness of Abdul and Suzi Ramdez who share her appeal to the reader as well as her amoral sense of personal justification. Nor is there forgotten the sinister Mrs. Hogg who pursued Caroline like a harpy before meeting her timely end. She is transformed into Miss Rickward whose attempts to foil Barbara's marriage are as fruitless as Mrs. Hogg's machinations in The Comforters. In the end, however, Miss Rickward, or Ricky, fares better than her predecessor since she does find a kind of happiness in the arms of a sultanic Arab. If anything, The Mandelbaum Gate, at least in those incidents which pertain most directly to Barbara and the working out of the dilemma which confronts her, seems even more complete and joyous in its conclusion than Mrs. Spark's first novel. Caroline's marriage might be an expectation, but Barbara's is a realization, almost evocative of a fairy-tale ending: "Barbara and Harry were married and got along fairly well together ever after." (368)

While Barbara's story is not the whole of The Mandelbaum Gate, it does carry the central plot and seems to occupy the forefront of Mrs. Spark's thought. Berthoff calls the novel a love story embracing the "wider themes" of "commitment and faith, spiritual agency and spiritual patience...." 7 A woman in her late thirties, Barbara
Vaughan undertakes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land both to visit the holy places and to be near her lover Harry Clegg, an archeologist at work on the Dead Sea scrolls in Jordan. Their marriage has thus far been prevented by the fact that she is a Catholic and he is divorced, and though proceedings for an annulment of his previous marriage are underway in Rome, there seems little hope of success. Separated from Harry in the Holy Land by the political division of the country—he is on the Arab side and she on the Israeli—Barbara tries to come to terms with her own divided nature: her spiritual ideals and her sexual needs, her faith and her love. The pilgrimage upon which she embarks parallels, in Malkoff's words, the struggle "toward religious and moral identity." ⑧

Displaced since childhood by reason of her Gentile and Jewish backgrounds, it is only when she reaches the Holy Land that Barbara begins "to feel a sense of her own identity." ⑵ Even her earlier conversion to Catholicism had proved insufficient for sorting out "her habits of mind [which] were inadequate to cope with the whole of her experience...." ⑴ Drifting ever nearer to the shoals of spinsterhood, Barbara had suddenly discovered herself in a passionate love-affair with Harry Clegg, from which she emerged with the realization that she is "more blessed by sex...by virtue of her Jewish blood" ⑷ than her
Gentile relatives. The dichotomy is basic to her nature, Malkoff argues, for she always associates her Jewishness with sexuality and her Christianity with spirituality.\(^9\) Having surrendered herself entirely to her love as "an entirely exclusive form as yet unrealized in human experience," Barbara was convinced that "It made nonsense of the rules. There were no moral laws to fit it." (42) Yet her love actually defines the dilemma she must face and insinuates itself like a wedge between the two realms of her experience, the spiritual and the physical. What Mrs. Spark describes as "something absolutely undisable in her nature, her Catholic faith," (46) finally drives Barbara to cut off physical relations between herself and Harry and forces her to the confessional where she repents, not of the love-affair, but of adultery. The difference is an important one to her since she feels "It is impossible to repent of love. The sin of love does not exist." (51) Nevertheless her love does effectively make a divided woman of her, for she finds herself committed to both of two apparently unalterable alternatives. The promise of love she will not forfeit and the reality of her faith she cannot disbelieve. The only resolution lies in an ecclesiastical annulment of Harry's marriage, the hope for which grows dimmer each day. It is at this point that Barbara finds herself in the Holy Land, paradoxically coming to grips with
her identity at the very moment when the duality of her nature seems most precarious.

In Mrs. Spark's other novels, love had been an ideal, rendered unattainable by reason of the divided moral order. The promise of fulfilling happiness on a physical level grew quickly distant immediately following The Comforters and seemed to vanish completely just prior to The Mandelbaum Gate. In the person of Barbara Vaughan, however, Mrs. Spark seems to reverse her position and declare once again, in terms even more embracing than those in The Comforters, the richness of possibility imparted by the extension of reality. Sexual love and religion come together as the defining factors of experience and are thus joined in a unity of vision found nowhere else in Mrs. Spark's fiction. If her Jewishness constitutes Barbara's sexuality and Catholicism her spirituality, an early statement in the novel specifies their intrinsic importance to one another and prefigures their consummate junction:

She then remarked,...that the Scriptures were specially important to the half-Jew turned Catholic. The Old Testament and the New, she said, were to her—as near as she could apply to her own experience the phrase of Dante's vision—'bound by love into one volume.'" (24)

Like Sandy Stranger before her, Barbara undergoes a transfiguration of awareness according to which the commonplace is rendered true and concrete in terms of moral real-
ity. Whereas Sandy's vision, however, forces her to the convent and a retreat into celibacy, Barbara's is, as Kermode demonstrates, a "transfiguration in faith and sensuality."\(^{10}\) While resting on Mount Tabor near the Basilica of the Transfiguration, Barbara begins to reflect that she has been motivated by "a 'Catholic point of view' to which not all facts were relevant." Though Mrs. Spark hastens to add that she had not "failed to grasp the Christian religion with a total sense of its universal application," it remains that Barbara has been unable to reconcile that particular "'Catholic point of view'" with "the whole of her experience." (20) The irrelevant facts are, apparently, those which deal with sexuality and love. In this regard, Barbara appears to be at the same impasse as Sandy Stranger, Ronald Bridges, and Nicholas Farringdon—bound by commitment to spiritual awareness at the expense of physical happiness. But again Mrs. Spark reverses the conditions. Barbara's identity lies in the here and now of the physical world as well as under the aegis of the spiritual. "Bound in duty to continuous acts of definition," she is not content with herself as "I am who I am," for such a realization is as mysterious as the God Who first gave it form. And "Mystery" is acceptable to her "only under the aspect of a crown of thorns," (27) not in relation to her everyday life. On the Mount of the
Transfiguration, Barbara discovers that her identity must be defined in terms of her physical nature before it can be completed in an eternity of the spirit:

She thought, my mind is impatient to escape from its constitution and reach its point somewhere else. But that is in eternity at the point of transfiguration. In the meantime, what is to be borne is to be praised. In the meantime, memory circulates like the bloodstream. May mine circulate well, may it bring dead facts to life, may it bring health to whatever is to be borne. (30-31)

In the meantime, Barbara is leaping the gulf at which Sandy, Ronald, and Nicholas have faltered.

The first part of The Mandelbaum Gate concentrates on Barbara's attempts to reconcile within herself the conflicting facts of her physical and spiritual nature. Though she has, by reason of her Faith, put off sexual relations with her lover, she has not renounced them indefinitely. Her Faith, in fact, seems to be the bane as well as the blessing of her existence, a paradox Mrs. Spark emphasizes, remarking on "the beautiful and dangerous gift of faith which, by definition of the Scriptures, is the sum of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen." (20) It is the danger entailed by Faith that predominates over the beauty throughout a great deal of the novel, most evident in the very fact of Barbara's pilgrimage through the Mandelbaum Gate into Arab territory. Since she is half-Jew, she risks imprisonment or worse (if discovered) by the Arab govern-
ment. Yet she insists on doing "something positive," (216) the only purpose she seems able to give for undertaking the journey. On the spiritual level, she is morally endangered by her intention to marry Harry whether the annulment is finally granted or not. "The only point at issue," she tells him, "is whether we can get married by the Church or not, that's to say, whether I'm going to have peace of mind for the rest of my life or not." (215)

Barbara's decision to marry, like her resolve to go on the pilgrimage, is both a positive move toward self-awareness and a flight from the sterile half-life of the spinster. While sexual renunciation and bachelorhood seemed necessarily concomitant to vision in Mrs. Spark's preceding novels, Barbara explicitly rejects the vocation of Ronald Bridges, Sandy Stranger, and Nicholas Farringdon as an inadequate means of apprehending the whole of one's being. Before she makes the actual decision to marry Harry and cross into Jordan, she tries to examine those elements which have thus far governed her life and stifled her fulfillment as an individual:

Because I'm a spinster that's taken a religious turn. A Gentile-Jew, neither one thing nor another, caught up in a crack-pot mystique. I declare that Miss Barbara Vaughan is a member of the Roman Catholic Church and has been known to me for some years. Life is passing. (53)

Later in the novel, Freddy Hamilton, her compatriot in the
pilgrimage to Jordan as well as the struggle to self-awareness, will ruminate with his girl friend on the aptness, profundity, and truth of the refrain that "life is love" and "love is life." (268) Both realities are now passing for Barbara. It is this fact which seems to override the others and spur her rejection of that fate bequeathed to her immediate predecessors in Mrs. Spark's world--withdrawal into a celibacy as unnaturally natural to the spinster as to the religious.

The convent and the priesthood had been the channels of refuge and redemption for Sandy Stranger and Nicholas Farringdon, even though peace seemed ultimately to elude her while death rapidly found him out. But vision yields different results in The Mandelbaum Gate. The exacting discipline and sacrifice of the convent seems to parallel the incomplete world of spinsterhood, and Barbara's flight from the latter entails a definite rejection of the former. Angry at herself for the fear and guilt she feels toward Ricky and her vigorous objections to marriage, Barbara suddenly perceives their relationship as one comparable, among other things, to "a neurotic Mother Superior to a nun with a craving to get out." She even remonstrates to herself, "I've taken no vows." (185) The imagery persists throughout the novel, so that it is impossible not to see in Barbara an ironic reversal of Sister Helena of the
Transfiguration. The first night of her stay in Arab Jerusalem is spent at St. Helena's convent, where she is regarded by the sisters as "a bit more nun-like" (178) than her fellow pilgrims. Awakened in the night by Freddy Hamilton and an Arab friend who fear for her life, Barbara, clad in "her Liberty dressing gown," (178) flees with them to a place of safety. Once outside the convent walls, however, "she had almost hoped to be caught, it would have been a relief and a kind of triumph and justification." (179) She delights in an imagined confrontation with the Mother Superior who has failed to see her as anything but an innocent spinster: "My dear good woman, things are not what they seem, as you in the religious life ought to know. Foolish virgin, hasn't experience taught you to expect the unexpected!" (180) Later she reflects that the extravagant details of the venture are "like the enactment of a reluctant nun's dream," and though she finds the recurring phrase "escape from the convent" at first comically absurd, she quickly realizes that "it had been an escape of a kind, as witness to which she could cite her present sense of release." Her final conclusion seals the matter: "The reality of the hour was her escape from the convent...." (193)

The Mandelbaum Gate thus seems a conscious effort on Mrs. Spark's part to restore a sense of balance to the implacable vision of disorder which has increasingly overwhelmed the world of her novels. The morbid concentration
on death and senility in *Memento Mori*, Ronald's bitterness at his fate in *The Bachelors*, Sandy's uneasiness and her annoying little eyes in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the sense of desolation in *The Girls of Slender Means*—each may be seen as an indication of Mrs. Spark's growing awareness that her vision admits of no reprieve, its range and scope threatened by the very sterility which parches the wasteland of her novels. An unyielding moral vision brings Barbara Vaughan to the same uncompromising wall before which huddle Mrs. Spark's other visionaries, murmuring the only words which can gain them access to fulfillment beyond—*memento mori*. It is a towering moral barrier which admits no union between physical and spiritual values until Barbara Vaughan simply bypasses it by denying its existence. Her predecessors were shackled by spiritual commitments; Barbara shakes free of them as so many bothersome worries. Ronald Bridges submitted to his epilepsy as to a vocation, and the disease affected his spiritual as well as his physical life. Barbara, however, "was now in good physical health; it was spiritual anaemia, she ruthlessly decided, that she was suffering from." (29) Spiritual liberation then becomes the ruthless cure. Rather than a convent, she decides, "it was an unidentified confinement of the soul she had escaped from." (195) It was this same type of spiritual confinement, or commitment, from which Ronald
Bridges and Sandy Stranger in particular found no release. Barbara, however, after briefly pondering the question of whether or not her intention to marry Harry regardless of the Church's ruling constitutes a moral sin, decides that the definition of responsibility according to the norms of the Church is too complicated and trying. She quickly dismisses the problem, as she puts off the reception of Holy Communion, "with a sense of reprieve:"

Rather wearily she felt her old identity returning in spite of this new disguise and the elation of the fantastic moment she had plunged into. It's too much for me, she thought, all this bothering myself and questioning all the time; I've had enough of it. (224)

The disguise is well in place as she begins her pilgrimage on the other side of the Mandelbaum Gate, feeling "for the first time in this Holy Land,...all of a piece, a Gentile Jewess, a private-judging Catholic, a shy adventuress." (194)

Like so many other elements of the novel, the structure is marked by division into two parts, dealing respectively with life on either side of the Mandelbaum Gate. The first concludes with Barbara, Freddy Hamilton, and Suzi Ramdez setting forth on their pilgrimage into the Jordanian Holy Places, while the second, entitled "The Passionate Pilgrims," is devoted almost entirely to the details of their consequent adventures and misadventures. Malkoff notes that the division of Jerusalem and the Holy Land mirrors
the divided personalities of the principal characters. On
the one hand, there is "rational, scientific Israel,"
countered on the other by "the bizarre, devious, emotional
Arab world." Returning to Carol Ohmann's Freudian analysis
of Robinson, he applies the same standards to The Mandelbaum
Gate whereby the Jordanian territory corresponds "to the
prelogical, desire-controlled id, and pragmatic, sensible
Israel to the Ego." In this way, the pilgrimage assumes
the dimensions of a descent into the psyche "and the be-
ginning of true insight into the self, the effects of which
remain even after the return to the rational world." The
scheme is an ingenious outline of the psychological com-
plexities of the novel and helps as well to sustain the
various moral dichotomies at work. For just as the depart-
ture point of Barbara's journey to self-awareness is her
flight from the rigid restrictions of spiritual discipline,
so her goal as a passionate pilgrim on the other side of the
Gate becomes sensual confirmation in, of all places, the
Holy Land.

Barbara's sojourn in Jordan takes the form of a re-
birth into physical and sexual awareness, after which she
returns to Israel and love and happiness with Harry. Since
she must travel incognito, she discards her Liberty dress-
ing gown in which she fled from the convent for the dress
of an Arab woman. Suzi Ramdez insists that Barbara first
remove all her own clothes, as though they were an encumbrance to a necessary ritual, since "It is right to be an Arab woman from the body outwards." (221) From one of the residents at the convent, however, she has unwittingly contracted scarlet fever, the symptoms of which begin to manifest themselves the next day as she attends Mass at the Holy Sepulchre. Upon leaving the tomb of Christ she is taken for quarantine to a remote establishment by the Dead Sea which functions as a channel of communication for an Arab spy ring and a temporary place of lodging for prostitutes in the service of Suzi's father. Her new abode is an ironically suitable one. Referring to her illness, Barbara jokingly calls herself "the scarlet woman," to which Suzi replies with her usual sense of responsibility, "It's God's blame." (281)

It is during her recuperation that Barbara rethinks her past and comes to grips with the role of sex and love in her life. As she tells Suzi, "it now seemed that she had been living like a nun without the intensity and reality of a nun's life." In contrast to the frigid chastity which previously governed her life as a spinster, she finds ample justification for Suzi's many love affairs:

"It's better to be a spinster like you and have lovers that you can give some actual love to, than have shadows in your heart of men that you don't know, and hate them." (338)
The pleasant sentiment suggests the author's endorsement, but what is most striking is the sudden emergence of love as a controlling value in Mrs. Spark's world, even to the extent of overruling what was in the earlier novels a defining factor of moral responsibility. It is particularly in this regard that Suzi and her brother Abdul play an important role in the novel. Both of them embody a concept of natural morality by which the individual designates the extent of guilt or innocence in accordance with his own peculiar code of values. What is good for the individual is de facto good, and vice-versa. Thus Abdul and Suzi are by turn smugglers, spies, and liars—but at the same time always innocent and, due to Mrs. Spark's characterizations, always lovable. It is in fact their love for one another that seems to be the abiding and unchangeable fact of their lives, even as it is their free and easy sensuality which gives them substance and definition in the novel. Of their unique relationship Mrs. Spark remarks that it "was not unlike an erotic passion....Abdul treated her as a girlfriend, and she was bold and merry with him...." (112)

Their type is found nowhere else in Mrs. Spark's novels with the possible exception of the legendary Dougal Douglas, and he functions as a moral barometer rather than a realistic character. In The Mandelbaum Gate, Berthoff argues, the relationship between Abdul and Suzi is more "strongly real-
ized" than that between Harry and Barbara. Yet it is in the context of Abdul and Suzi's world that Barbara truly discovers herself.

Though Barbara commits herself to happiness on the material level, the vision which motivates her is nonetheless directed toward a unified rather than divided sensibility. Mrs. Spark may seem to stress the move toward physical awareness, but it is an obvious necessity in light of the serious imbalance away from the physical in the other novels. The theme of *The Mandelbaum Gate* remains totality of being, to achieve which Barbara must incorporate her new awareness within the framework of the moral law. This she does by recourse to Divine Providence and the immense possibilities afforded by the mystery of a physical-spiritual reality. It is a sleight-of-hand on Mrs. Spark's part that conjures up the trademark of vision in her earliest novels, where possibility accounted for the material manifestations of the supernatural, and applies it to *The Mandelbaum Gate* in order to justify the individual and sometimes irresponsible actions of her questing pilgrims. Barbara's cry in the desert, contrasting to that "good, loud and frightening" (331) proclamation of John the Baptist which echoed from the same spot, becomes: "With God, everything is possible." (296) With these words she greets the news of Harry's annulment, granted in spite of overwhelming odds
to the contrary. Her decision to marry him is thus confirmed by the blessings of the Church, even though she had decided while in Jordan that such approval was not the prime necessity. The relation of sex and love to spiritual reality had already been determined by her, and the argument is worth quoting at length:

Sex is child's play. Jesus Christ was very sophisticated on the subject of sex. And didn't harp on it. Why is it so predominant and serious for us? There are more serious things in the world. And if sex is not child's play, in any case it is worthless. For she was thinking of her own recent experiences of sex, which were the only experiences she knew that were worth thinking about. It was child's play, unself-conscious and so full of fun and therefore of peace, that she had not bothered to analyse or define it. And, she thought, we have invented sex guilt to take our minds off the real thing. (318-319)

The process of rebirth is almost complete as the moral order sheds its earlier confining restrictions to take on a new aspect of complementary, rather than conflicting, realities. Flight from spiritual responsibility leads back to a new spiritual awareness nourished by the discovery of the physical self. The illness is at an end: "From being confined with the fever like this, Barbara Vaughan had taken one of her religious turns, and was truly given to the love of God, and all things were possible." (319) It only remains for her to cross back through the Mandelbaum Gate dressed as a nun, this time truly a disguise and a
comical one at that, to race down the "sweet, rational streets" (365) of Israel with joyful abandon and to rush as a consummate finality into the arms of her lover.

Through a circuitous and sometimes tortured process of debate, Barbara paradoxically arrives at the ultimate realization that supernatural Faith alone gives body and meaning to reality. She tells Suzi in the desert:

"Well, either religious faith penetrates everything in life or it doesn't.... Either the whole of life is unified under God or everything falls apart. Sex is child's play in the argument." (344)

Vision then in The Mandelbaum Gate comes to rest heavily on the idea of Divine Providence as a positive force in the world acting for the good and happiness of men. The latter object was not so evident in the machinations of the typist, the telephone caller, the "vigilant manipulator," and the hunter in the preceding novels, but it is intrinsic to Barbara's fate. The annulment is finally granted on false grounds of which neither Barbara nor the Church are aware. In a desperate effort to undermine the marriage, Ricky had forged a baptismal certificate testifying to Harry's being a Catholic with the idea that this evidence would surely nullify his divorce in the eyes of the Church and bring the annulment proceedings to an abrupt close. The very opposite is true, however, since if Harry were a Catholic and married outside of the Church as he was, the union would
never have received ecclesiastical approval and would therefore be invalid. Consequently, he and Barbara are free to marry with the full approval of the Church, and she can retain her peace of mind. It is "the sweet Lord's ingenuity" (198) rather than his ruthless manipulation which causes one to marvel, like Barbara, at the order of the world in The Mandelbaum Gate.

Mrs. Spark seems to offer as testament to Barbara's point of view the lengthy sermon by an English priest at the Holy Sepulchre which opens the second part of the novel. The subject of his discourse is the power of faith to assimilate the truths of experience and so order existence toward the reality of eternity. What governs the moral order, he concludes, is "a supernatural process going on under the surface and within the substance of all things." (239) The process is discerned, if not understood, only through the gift of Faith, the function of which bestows upon the believer alone the prerogative of doubt:

"...the unbeliever cannot know doubt. And in what is doubtful we should doubt well. But in whatever touches the human spirit, it is better to believe everything than nothing. Have faith. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen." (240)

Barbara Vaughan does doubt well. She writes to Harry about the theological difficulties surrounding their marriage "in the excessively rational terms employed by people with a
secret panic or religious doubt" (47) and later concludes about the question of whether intention alone constitutes sin--"...if there's a doubt in one's mind, then it's all right." (224) Barbara has Faith in the Providential process which, like a very literal deus ex machina, rescues her peace of mind and sustains her happiness.

So does Mrs. Spark herself, it would appear from an earlier comment on her style as an artist:

I didn't get my style until I became a Catholic because you just haven't got to care, and you need security for that. That's the whole secret of style in a way. It's simply not caring too much, it's caring only a little. I'm a great believer in providence. I believe that things work out providentially in a way. It's not quite fatalism, but watching until you see the whole picture emerge. I do go by providence a lot. I have had to.13

The statement is a revealing one in relation to the contrast between The Mandelbaum Gate and her other works. The diffident tone is as noticeably out of tune with most of the previous novels as it is in harmony with Barbara's tale, though "fatalism" is more suggestive of the others' themes. This apparent inconsistency is perhaps best understood by recalling Barbara's realization that "the point of transfiguration" lies in eternity, leaving to the interval of life the fact that "what is to be borne is to be praised."

Not content with such a deterministic point of view, however,
she dresses the interval in optimism and invokes "health to whatever is to be borne." (30-31) So, it seems, does Muriel Spark in The Mandelbaum Gate, and the pose is ill-fitting. While her earlier novels progressively filed away at the definition of man in relation to a society mindless of ideals and ignorant of values other than the grossly material, The Mandelbaum Gate seems to shy away from the problem and to bring transfiguration into a world which is not capable of it. For the first time, vision invites self-fulfillment at the price of responsibility. Elements such as prostitution, thievery, and free love, all of which were used in other novels to illustrate the decadence of moral awareness, here become comic additions to the plot. Suzi, one of the most likable characters in the novel, does object to her father's business of prostitution, but only because it might be given up "for a more profitable and more tasteful, possibly more subtle, form of corruption." (282) Mrs. Spark's apparent shift in attitude might be acceptable were it given a stronger basis than Barbara Vaughan's presumptive shrugging of the shoulders in regard to her spiritual commitments and her later resort for peace and redemption to a Providence too readily at hand. As it is, the resolution of Barbara's dilemma is obliging rather than rewarding.

From another perspective Berthoff declares that the novel fails because there is "a real specifiable emptiness
at the narrative center"—namely, the inadequacy of Barbara Vaughan as a character to convey the concept of love which is the novel's basic theme.\(^{14}\) Instead of a living person, he argues, she exists as another of many contrivances in the story, manipulated to resolve Mrs. Spark's ideas. Since Barbara is unconvincing, the theme likewise lacks credibility. Summarizing his criticism, Berthoff cites an especially damning piece of evidence from the novel which stands as a prime example of its artificial argument:

> On this I can only report a finding that the motion of love is premised but not substantiated—and, further, that to come late in the book upon Barbara's brief meditation on sexual love as "child's play, unself-conscious and so full of fun and therefore of peace," is to lose one's inclination to take this character and what passes within her seriously on any level....\(^{15}\)

It must be conceded that Berthoff's final judgment of the novel is correct. The Mandelbaum Gate is a failure, precisely because it does not convince. Though he acknowledges, along with Frank Kermode, the dazzling virtuosity of the plot and multiple metaphors with which Mrs. Spark structures her story, he cannot find in the technical mastery alone, as Kermode seems to, the basis for satisfying fiction. The very qualities of the novel Berthoff rejects, Kermode selects as indicative of its greatness:

"The novelist, presumptuous, arbitrary, scheming, and faking,
lying like the fiend, makes things like worlds, plots absurdly like God's." God as he appears in Mrs. Spark's fiction, however, would not seem to be the best model for a writer, defined as He is by mystery and the surpassing of all understanding.

The mystery which underlies the novel finally undermines it as well. Barbara's early relegation of Mystery to spiritual reality alone is the basis of her movement toward physical awareness, and yet at the end of the novel it is Mystery she invokes to explain and justify her actions. "Knots," she conveniently decides, "were not necessarily created to be untied. Questions were things that sufficed in their still beauty, answering themselves." (337) The rhetoric of her conclusion does not explain its meaning nor justify its foundations. Barbara simply skirts the issue, as must Mrs. Spark if she is to make it over the wall and across the abyss.

For in the background of The Mandelbaum Gate yawns the same gaping hole in the moral order as was made by the bomb in the garden of the May of Teck. Adolf Eichmann is on trial in Israel at the same time Barbara makes her pilgrimage, and one of her stopping places is the scene of the court proceedings against Hitler's mass exterminator. The trial has reached its most boring phase, Eichmann being quizzed by his defense lawyers detail by detail concerning
his function in the Nazi machine. But Barbara perceives "that this dull phase was in reality the desperate heart of the trial." (210) The defendant's response to his lawyer's question is monotonous and unvaried, disclaiming any responsibility since he was only performing his assigned duties as a part of Bureau IV-B-4. Barbara compares the narrative of the proceedings to the fiction and drama of the new French writers—"repetition, boredom, despair, going nowhere for nothing, all of which conditions are enclosed in a tight, unbreakable statement of the times at hand." (210) But this is neither novel nor play, and though Barbara continues to view Eichmann as "a character from the pages of a long anti-roman," (212) the names of his victims are "locked in reality." (212) She discovers in the muted horror of the trial that "the terrible paradox remained,...the actual discourse was a mechanical tick, while its subject, the massacre, was living." (210)

Lying near the very center of the novel, this account of the Eichmann trial seems to bring to the forefront that same irreducible vision of evil and moral horror which was so immediate to The Bachelors and The Girls of Slender Means. Eichmann, like Seton, speaks not for himself, "but for an imperative deity named Bureau IV-B-4, of whom he was the High Priest." There is no such thing as human responsibility or moral commitment in the service of this mechanized barbarity, and just as Seton defended himself according to the
all-permissive code of Spiritualism, so Eichmann has recourse to "the complex theology in which not his own actions, not even Hitler's, were the theme of his defence, but the honour of the Supreme Being, the system, and its least tributary, Bureau-IV-B-4." (212-213)

In what appears to be the most optimistic of her novels, Mrs. Spark sketches the darkest and most alarming portrait of evil as an active, violent force in the world. The war, a literal as well as symbolic manifestation of the power of darkness in men's lives, is brought to its sharpest focus in The Mandelbaum Gate and revealed in its most inhuman and fiendish aspects as the theologic ritual of a material order pledged to the worship of methodical destruction. The "system" seems to replace God, Who is more distant than ever before in Mrs. Spark's novels. She concludes the incident of the Eichmann interrogation with the remark that "It was a highly religious trial," but not before she gratuitously voices and answers another inquiry in the words of Samuel Beckett:

--What are you waiting for?  
--We're waiting for Godot. (213)

In The Bachelors, where there occurred another highly religious trial, God himself became the defendant and victory was an ambiguous affair. But Godot never arrives in Beckett's world, and it is man himself who is on trial, possibly even condemned. Barbara Vaughan glimpses a simi-
lar reality in Mrs. Spark's world, before the author hurries God onto the stage to save the happy ending.

Berthoff had rightly criticized *The Mandelbaum Gate* for one kind of emptiness in its narrative structure, but there is another, a moral emptiness, given form by the Eichmann trial, which is truer to the vision Mrs. Spark tries so unavailingly to renounce, the vision which does convince. Love is impossible in most of her other novels because the world in which it must function is structured solely on material values, and in order to fulfill itself love must demand commitment of the spirit as well as the body. Thus the ideal of marriage, representing the union of the two orders of reality in harmony and peace, is seldom achieved because the world is basically loveless—witness the reality of an Adolf Eichmann. Yet there is almost a desperation in Mrs. Spark's attempt to prove otherwise in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, to evoke once again that sense of possibility which pervaded *The Comforters* before it gradually dies away in the other novels. Near the end of *The Mandelbaum Gate*, therefore, Barbara returns to a consideration of the Eichmann affair only to beat a conscious retreat from its frightening truth into the security of her marriage:

She was thinking of the Eichmann trial, and was aware that there were other events too, which rolled away the stone
that revealed an empty hole in the earth, that led to a bottomless pit. So that people drew back quickly and looked elsewhere for reality, and found it, and made decisions, in the way that she had decided to get married, anyway. (344)

If there is a good deal of flagrant and unsatisfying artifice in Mrs. Spark's efforts to give credence to Barbara's vision of consolation, there is also a redeeming truth and honesty in her realization that the attempt cannot wholly succeed. Counterbalancing Barbara's discovery of fulfilling happiness is the moral vacuum revealed by the Eichmann trial, and in contrast to her tale of love is the study of failure in Freddy Hamilton. The relationship between Freddy and Barbara rounds out the elaborate system of parallels and contrasts upon which the novel is carefully and deliberately structured. Both begin as divided characters, committed to a single perspective of reality, and both explore as passionate pilgrims the possibility of love and freedom from the shackles of responsibility. Whereas Barbara succeeds and returns to Israel as a woman of unified sensibilities, Freddy returns a defeated man, tormented by guilt and the knowledge that such a union is impossible for him. His rebirth is aborted, and so in a sense is the vision of unity underlying Barbara's awareness of reality. She may dominate the action, but she does not complete it. It is Freddy with whom the book opens and
closes, and it is his vision which strikes the discordant but true note in the novel's inadequate resolution. What is finally unsatisfactory about The Mandelbaum Gate is the failure of its theme—the vision of unity remains unfulfilled. At the same time, the lack of success attendant on her efforts is indicative of Mrs. Spark's inability to delude herself, though try she will, about the reality she has so implacably defined in her preceding works, a reality in which Freddy Hamilton would be right at home.

He is the artist-figure in the novel: typically, a failed artist. Given to the composition of highly technical but superficial verse usually written as a compliment to his friends, Freddy views Barbara Vaughan "with that total perceptivity of his which might have made a poet of him, given the missing element." (12) The missing element is apparently the lack of any real purpose to his life. For though he has been divorced for some years—the marriage lasted less than a year—Freddy is actually another of Mrs. Spark's bachelors, cut off from love and committed only to the dull routine of his job in the British consulate. In fact, it is a minor subplot from The Bachelors, Richard Mayne notes, that Mrs. Spark draws upon as one of the crucial elements in defining Freddy's role. In the earlier novel, Martin Bowles was led a harried existence trying to ease the senile conflicts between his aged mother and her
former housekeeper, both of whom shared his home. The same
dilemma faces Freddy, though his mother and her housekeeper
Benny live together at Harrogate in England. It is up to
him, his sisters having disclaimed all responsibility, to try
to placate the two old ladies and relax tensions which have
been reaching new and alarming proportions. His mother has
been a vicious tyrant and liar all her life, and senility
has only sharpened her attacks on Benny. Meanwhile, letters
from Benny speak ominously of the Devil and Blood and
tempting voices whose words are violence. The foreboding
situation is clear enough to Freddy, and it is his conse-
quent reactions that largely shape his destiny in the
novel.

Like Barbara, Freddy is arraigned by the author on
charges of failure to meet his commitments. She dismisses
the case, but he cannot. The stultifying responsibilities
in distant England, not only the care of his mother and
Benny but the support of his ex-wife, are cast loose for
two days of amoral freedom and sexual happiness on the
other side of the Mandelbaum Gate. But on the third day
he returns to Israel, the victim of amnesia, aware of none
of his past joys but only of a fearful premonition of blood-
shed. Later he learns that his mother has been murdered
through his negligence and that the girl with whom he al-
most found a moment's love is nearly sent to prison because
of his betrayal of her. Where Barbara draws fulfillment
from her freedom, Freddy learns, as Malkoff points out, "responsibility and guilt." ¹⁸

Mrs. Spark details the nature of Freddy's temporary deliverance in terms parallel to the flight of Barbara Vaughan. He himself observes that "she did disappear from the convent on the same day that I disappeared from myself, so to speak." ¹⁴⁸ It is Barbara, on the other hand, who twice comments that she had caught a share of "Freddy's madness." ¹⁹⁴ Actually Freddy is the one who instigates Barbara's escape because he fears for her safety, a praiseworthy resolve especially since he had earlier shrugged off the thought of responsibility for her like "Pontius Pilate washing his hands of a potential source of embarrass-
ment..." ¹⁸ Yet the final decision comes to him as he stands on "the Hill of Evil Counsel," ¹⁵⁷ and his move to aid Barbara is prefaced by a central action in regard to himself which, in spite of everything he does, suggests the role of Pilate. Earlier he had written two letters which he carries with him from the Hill, one to Benny begging her continued tolerance of his mother and one to a physician asking that he look in on Benny lest her excited imagination provoke danger. Oddly enough, however, the thought of his mother's death finds him wearing an unconscionous smile. Though he had originally intended to post the correspondence, especially "the all-responsible letter to the doctor," ²⁴² he descends the hill and soon burns
both letters to ashes, flushing their remains down the toilet. Mrs. Spark remarks that "His total effort was doomed to success. The last of the Harrogate relics disappeared." (162)

Everyone applauds his flushing away of responsibility, especially Barbara, who wishes she had done the same with a letter from Ricky. "I should have put it all down the loo," she says, "reply and all, that's what I should have done." For which Freddy again congratulates himself: "Any correspondence that's bloody boring, just pull the chain on it. That's my motto." (196) But it is the results of his actions which are bloody, for Benny actually does murder his mother. And while the realization of love and the comfort of God will come to Barbara as a result of her "respite from responsibility for herself," (255) Freddy will look back on his brief enjoyment of freedom "with a sense of special irresponsibility" (258) and will feel "untold guilt." (354)

As its outset, however, Freddy's passionate pilgrimage follows the same lines as Barbara's. He feels "very young and happy" upon his departure from the Hill of Evil Counsel, "more wide awake than he had felt for years," (160) and he begins to see himself "in a physical way." (166) The progress of this new awareness proceeds from exchanging sweet platitudes about life and love with Suzi Ramdez to finally
sharing her bed. But here his pilgrimage ends. For what Freddy experiences is not so much love, which is commitment and enjoyment, as it is the simple sensation of pleasure. Despite his adjurations to himself "that of course he would not think of using her as a mere means to some external purpose," (262) Suzi does become a tool for his unravelling the secrets of a spy ring. He consoles himself for his actions--"It was just hard luck finding himself on duty like this" (271)--while to Suzi he lies, telling her, as he burns a piece of evidence he has just committed to memory, that the fire consumes a poem written for her even as her love consumes his heart. Mrs. Spark, however, says that he lights the paper just "as he had done when burning the Harrogate letters in order to send them easier down the drain." (289) Along with responsibility, love receives a vigorous flushing.

It would not do to be too hard on Freddy Hamilton, for he is probably the most sympathetic character in the novel. For George Green he is at least the "most agreeable." 19 If his actions appear ruthless from a distance, they are greeted at the time with delight and the approbation of the other characters. Suzi, for instance, though she strongly suspects him of using the situation to gather information about espionage activities, still sleeps with him and seeks his love. Barbara, on the other hand, finds it "truly
exhilarating" (219) to contemplate his destruction of the Harrogate letters. Even Mrs. Spark herself seems partial to the Freddy of two lost days in Jordan. She says of his later self-evaluation:

...he came to discern, too late for action but more and more clearly as the years sifted past, that he had been neither a monster nor a fool, but had behaved rather well, and at least with style and courage. Looking back at the experience in later years Freddy was amazed. It had seemed to transfigure his life, without any disastrous change in the appearance of things; pleasantly and essentially he came to feel it had made a free man of him where before he had been the subdued, obedient servant of a mere disorderly sensation, that of impersonal guilt. And whether this feeling of Freddy's subsequent years was justified or not, it did him good to harbour it. (165-166)

The basic dilemma of the moral order is again realized as it has been throughout her fiction. Freddy perceives a world of possibility only in perspective of the past; awareness may be his but not fulfillment. Moreover, that awareness is only achieved on the heels of shame, sorrow, and guilt.

What Berthoff describes as "Freddy's brief interval of unconstrained commitment to 'life'" 20 is as doomed to failure as his efforts in burning the Harrogate letters were "doomed to success." (162) Amnesia strikes as soon as he crosses the Mandelbaum Gate, and Freddy returns to "the lack
of hope and fun in his life" (272) which cannot be banished for long. The world of *The Bachelors* is his milieu and its dark truths his fate. Moral commitment to the dictates of reality defines responsibility, and since that reality is a world of shattered values divided in conflict by two opposing elements, responsibility denies happiness. There is an inevitability about such an order that Mrs. Spark tries to spare Freddy, but her justification of him, as the novel itself indicates, bears all the signs of illusion. Reality will not go away.

This remains the controlling if not dominant vision of the novel: the sense of division in the moral order and within man himself. Thus Mrs. Spark concludes the book with Freddy before the Mandelbaum Gate, "fumbling...for his diplomatic pass." (369) He is a composite of all her other characters drawn up before the fact of division in their lives and in their world. Though Freddy will probably find his pass and cross through the Gate, he will not be able to bridge those elements in his life which separate him from love and happiness. Awareness will come later like hope, but both will be of memories. Possibility is strictly limited to the past, a fact Mrs. Spark restates in a passage which cannot but call to mind similar conclusions at the end of *Robinson* and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*:

And all this...was soon to be gone from his memory for many months,
suddenly returning on a day when the sun was a crimson disc between the bare branches of Kensington Gardens, and the skaters on the Round Pond were all splashed over the heads and arms with red light, as they beat their mittens together and skimmed the dark white ice under the sky. So it was to be throughout the years; it was always unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, that the sweetest experiences of his madness returned; he was amazed at his irresponsibility for a space, then he marvelled that he could have been so light-hearted, and sooner or later he was overwhelmed with an image, here and there, of beauty and delight, as in occasional memories of childhood. (303-304)

The remembrance of wonder is bright and warm, but fleeting. In reality, the sun is setting and the time of cold is descending.

It is both the merit and the fault of The Mandelbaum Gate that its grasp for unity fails. Though Mrs. Spark tries to bring to life a pleasant reality she has all but denied elsewhere in her novels, the effort at compromise is strained and weak. If Barbara Vaughan is to represent the individual blessed with fulfillment as though this were the best of all possible worlds, Freddy Hamilton embodies the author's understanding that in the real world Pippa has passed and gone. The novel shows Muriel Spark before a moral order at war, like Freddy Hamilton at the Mandelbaum Gate, fumbling desperately for the pass that will insure entry and safe conduct. Naturally, the attempt is doomed to failure.
NOTES TO CHAPTER V

4. Baldanza avoids the term "microcosm" in acknowledging Mrs. Spark's use "of a natural group of persons...who have common interests or habits, or else a group of persons associated with an institution," as a "new organizational device that replaces the occult" in the latter novels preceding The Mandelbaum Gate. (Baldanza, p. 200) Though he dates the inception of the scheme with Memento Mori, it is obvious that setting serves the same purpose in Robinson and The Ballad of Peckham Rye.
5. Malkoff, Spark, p. 43.
18. Malkoff, Spark, p. 44.


21. Though Irving Malin tries to see the conclusion as highly affirmative in its implications of unity, his argument does not account for the presence of Freddy at the end instead of Barbara, who would surely add more credence to such a view. Moreover, his suggestion that "things were unified, and if we look closely enough, they still are" (Malin, p. 107) entails such literal straining on his own part as to cause some suspicion.
CHAPTER VI

MADNESS AND ABSURDITY: The Public Image, The Driver's Seat, and Not to Disturb

At present The Mandelbaum Gate must stand as the watershed in Muriel Spark's fiction. The search for unity in a world of divided realities reverses the direction of her preceding novels which traced the development of moral awareness in a stringent vision of disorder and disparity of values. In commitment to the reality they glimpse, which is both diversity and division, her characters pass from wonder and delight in The Comforters to a sense of lost possibility in Robinson and The Ballad of Peckham Rye. Memento Mori and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie define responsibility for the individual in terms of withdrawal from a diseased social and physical order, but in The Bachelors and The Girls of Slender Means the response demanded by vision is further honed to require nothing less than suffering and death. Against these extremities Mrs. Spark then constructed the massive complexities of The Mandelbaum Gate, trying to draw unity from the chaos of the modern world and resolve the conflict between physical and spiritual values which lies at the heart of the moral disorder. Yet even in The Mandelbaum Gate the direction is uncertain, wavering between hope of fulfillment in Barbara Vaughan and recognition of failure in Freddy Hamilton. The result reflects
the indecision. There is no real resolution to the novel, unless it can be said that the inability of Barbara and Freddy to function as individuals in the context of one controlling vision of unity demonstrates in itself the inadequacy and impossibility of such a concept. Regardless of intention, unresolved polarities abide at the conclusion of The Mandelbaum Gate. As though aware of her own failure, Mrs. Spark returns in her last three novels to that bleak world of shattered illusions which is her natural habitat as artist and moralist. In her absence it has grown even more unsparing and forbidding.

* * * * * * * *

The Public Image introduces a new perspective into Mrs. Spark's fiction which is as much a contrast to her other novels as it is a natural development from their themes. The conflict between spiritual and physical reality which evoked in her earliest novels the concrete presentation of supernatural forces gradually gave way to a more subtle presentation of the opposition of values and dimensions of reality which those forces represented. Still the presence of spiritual concerns was of imminent importance, as evidenced by her Catholic characters and frequent religious allusions. Again The Mandelbaum Gate is central in tracing the development of this aspect of her art. In that novel Mrs. Spark returned to a heavy reliance on specific theological argu-
ments and explicit religious imagery, such as she had used in *The Comforters*, *Robinson*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, and *The Bachelors*. Yet after these particular novels, the role of religious truth, i.e., reality as defined by dogma, diminished as a governing factor of vision in accordance with the disappearance of the supernatural as a visible presence. Morality rather than religion is the prime agent of awareness in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Girls of Slender Means*. Sandy and Nicholas are converted at the end of the novels rather than at the beginning; Catholicism, like the religious life, becomes a means of coping with a vision of chaotic reality for which Faith alone can offer meaning and order. The failure of *The Mandelbaum Gate* stems precisely from the inability of Mrs. Spark to structure vision along lines of reality other than those imposed by her own awareness of moral polarities, to which her Catholicism gives form. To justify the falsity of Barbara's views on responsibility and commitment, she must resort to theological trickery. Artifice breeding artifice yields a happy, if not truthful or realistic, ending. Therefore *The Public Image*, *The Driver's Seat*, and *Not to Disturb* continue the development of vision in line with moral rather than religious truth which was interrupted by *The Mandelbaum Gate*. Her Catholicism operates upon her latest fiction more indirectly than every before, from the distant perspective of loose
allegory.

Like Barbara Vaughan and others before her in Mrs. Spark's fiction, Annabel Christopher in The Public Image faces the necessity of trying to reconcile two conflicting orders of reality. Her success as a rising young film star is due largely to her carefully fostered public image as a perfect wife, whose rapt devotion to her husband Frederick barely conceals a smoldering and passionate nature which has earned her the sobriquet of Tiger Lady. In private life, however, the lie of her marriage is a raw wound, threatening to fester publicly and thus destroy the myth on which her career depends. She and her husband are on the brink of a divorce when it is brought to her attention by the film company for which she works that such an action must be so timed and coordinated as not to detract from her role as a public idol. When Annabel first realizes the degree to which her life must be manipulated in order to fit her image, she takes "fright at the whole mythology that had vaporized so quickly about her, and turn[s] to Frederick in real panic." The only result is her pregnancy, which is not enough to cement their crumbling relationship. Later, Frederick commits suicide as an act of vengeance whereby he seeks to destroy those illusions on which her public life is nurtured. The major part of the novel then details Annabel's attempt to thwart his scheme and to sustain the truth of her
private role as solicitous mother without denying the falsity of her public pose as Tiger Lady. It is unity of expression and presentation which she seeks, but it is commitment she must face. Upon her efforts rests the fate of her child.

The drama unfolds in a world of stark, physical reality, captured in the glare of the European film world and sharply isolated from any sense of spiritual values. The sweet life becomes the good life in Italy, "the Motherland of Sensation," (26) and the nation at whose center lies the capital of Christendom is in actuality "only a country of dramatic history, cradled in the Seven Capital Sins...." (25) from which is launched not the spirit of the Gospel but the vice-ridden sensationalism of the film weeklies. In such a milieu, virtue and goodness are defined by their opposites, and the major polarities of truth and deception govern the role of awareness even as they are in turn controlled by the eye of the camera and the pen of the artist. Love becomes a celluloid gloss masking hate while marriage functions as a convenience of the director and publicity agent. Though Annabel and Frederick shine as the perfect couple before the press, their private relationship is a shambles. Before the birth of the baby, both indulge in extra-marital affairs as casually as they pose for photographs. The child does provide a new basis of order for Annabel, but Frederick is not included. His public life with Annabel
continues as "a trailing extension of the film" starring "the English Tiger Lady," (23) but his private life is a furtive progression from one illicit encounter to another. Finally driven to madness, he leaps to his death in the Church of St. John and St. Paul, but not before carefully framing his wife as the host and organizer of a wild orgy on the night of his demise. In addition, he writes a number of suicide notes calculated to win sympathy for him and impose blame and responsibility on Annabel. He so directs his own ruin as to initiate her destruction as well. His suicide becomes a martyrdom, and he lies in a crumpled heap beneath the scaffolding of the church on the same spot reputed to be the place of death for St. Paul.

To preserve the innocence of her public image, Annabel too must distort the truth and at least partially accede to the infamous script contrived by Frederick. She preserves the myth of his martyrdom, projecting him as a victim of love, driven to his desperate end by a band of pursuant harpies bent on his corruption. Her public image can be preserved only by rewriting the truth to fit the film of her public life. Together with her director, therefore, she rearranges events and organizes the script to fit her needs. Even he, "who was truly in a position to discern a talent for acting," is unsettled by Annabel's ability to distort the truth so convincingly. Though he has tried
repeatedly to coax her into his bed, watching Annabel in action off the set still manipulating reality as though she were before the floodlights makes him "glad that his wife, after all, was different from this." (108) Later he will complain about their efforts to dupe the authorities concerning the real motive for Frederick's death, "I don't like this business of directing an inquest like a movie." (135)

An adept in the practice of deception, Annabel nevertheless does not succumb to the unreality she herself portrays. Unlike her husband, who cultivates for himself "a private self-image of seriousness," (22) Annabel never fails to preserve a true sense of perspective concerning the relationship between her screen roles and her actual self. Mrs. Spark informs us that she "was entirely aware of the image-making process in every phase." (29) Whereas Frederick is of the opinion that an actor should submerge himself in the part he plays and radiate "from the soul outward" (17) the experiences he is to portray, his wife realizes that her only talent consists in playing herself before the camera. Thus he greets her success with "a dazzled exasperation at her capacity for achieving the most impressive effects by the most superficial means and feeds his jealousy with "a sense of the enormity of her deception." (17) He continues to immerse himself in his own "role as a man of theory," (22) refusing to play any-
thing but those "few parts suited to his acting talents, so far as talent, continually unapplied, can be said to exist." (8) Since offers for these roles never materialize, Frederick never rises from the stultifying abstraction of his theory, drawing from Mrs. Spark the following acid observation: "...and so far as that went he was right, everything being drably right in the sphere of hypotheses, nothing being measurably or redeemably wrong." (9)

Yet The Public Image is a novel about redemption, and what saves Annabel, writes A. S. Byatt, is precisely the fact that she "acts in her work and her life alike. Frederick remains in a limbo of inaction." Though Annabel conforms to the fantasy of her public image while before the cameras and press, her private life is devoted to the baby, "the only reality of her life." (38) When Frederick's suicide threatens to upset the balance between the two orders of her existence, she is forced to face the necessity of commitment to one or the other. Despite her director's suggestion that a change of image from the innocent, perfect wife to the woman of experience might accommodate the scandal to her career, Annabel vehemently rejects the donning of such a role to fit the reality of her privacy: "No, I'm going to save my image. I've got my baby to think of. How could I become a wild woman in private life after being my sort of wife?" (115) The salvation of her image at first
results in a muddle of values and commitments. Earlier she had refused to let the baby become a part of her publicity parade, but she flaunts him at the hour of tragedy "like a triumphant shield," (74) using his innocence to support the myth of her own. Before Frederick's insane act topples the neat structure of her world, Annabel finds in her child "a sense of being permanently secured to the world which she had not experienced since her own childhood had passed" and she fears making a display of him, lest "this deep and complete satisfaction might be disfigured or melted away by some public image." (38) The dichotomy between the values of innocence and experience is clear, as is the choice Annabel must make if she is to retain the last vestige of her own integrity. To incorporate the baby into the web of deceit which structures her defense is to compromise the last semblance of reality and the only legitimate ideal in her life. At the last instant Annabel spurns the script of lies and opts for the freedom from public nightmares which her baby enjoys. She rejects the threat of blackmail from Billy O'Brien, her husband's friend and her own former lover, and turns over to the court the maniacal suicide letters, thereby effectively erasing her public image and destroying her career. Her moral redemption denies public salvation. To her lawyer's query about the motive for such a needless gesture--she could easily have paid the blackmail price--
Annabel replies quite simply, "I want to be free like my baby." (142)

The novel ends with Annabel and her child at the airport, standing unnoticed in the crowd and waiting to board a flight away from Italy, the sensational inquest, and the flash of the photographer's bulbs:

Waiting for the order to board, she felt both free and unfree. The heavy weight of the bags was gone; she felt as if she was still, curiously, pregnant with the baby, but not pregnant in fact. She was pale as a shell. She did not wear her dark glasses. Nobody recognized her as she stood, having moved the baby to rest on her hip, conscious also of the baby in a sense weightlessly and perpetually within her, as an empty shell contains, by its very structure, the echo and hark- ing image of former and former seas. (144)

Byatt describes the scene as "a new and haunting image of the continuity of life," but George Stade and E. C. Bufkin are probably closer to the truth in sensing allegorical implications whereby Annabel is transformed into a Madonna figure, such as the Stella Maris. Bufkin, in fact, reads the whole novel as "a kind of miracle play," culminating in "a parodistic version of imminent Assumption" by the Madonna-heroine whose name literally translates as "'beautiful grace,' 'bearer of Christ.'"

If he sometimes stretches a point to fit the allegorical structure he would impose on the novel, as when he views Frederick as a real martyr and savior acting for Annabel's
salvation, Bufkin nevertheless correctly surmises the moral intent of the novel, especially in regard to the concluding scene, as stressing the redemption of the individual rather than the sheer endurance Byatt suggests. Yet Annabel's freedom is not achieved without sacrifice, and even then it must remain incomplete, a fact which aligns her with Mrs. Spark's earlier heroines just as it distinguishes her from Barbara Vaughan, who gains everything for her troubles. For Annabel, freedom is simply a commitment to the ideals of innocence, a primitive and primeval quality—like the echo of former seas—in the hollow present. Innocence itself, however, lies in the past along with the sense of possibility, so that freedom is limited to striving without fulfillment. "In fact," Mrs. Spark remarks about Annabel's desire to share her infant's freedom, "she had felt, as she still felt, neither free nor unfree. She was not sure what those words meant." It is commitment along with the baby which she embraces, a sense of reality with which, at the novel's conclusion, "she was entirely satisfied, now,..." (142-143)

Yet Annabel's happiness and promise is also as fragile as the metaphorical shell which she becomes. The concluding image is an obvious contrast to an earlier accusation by Frederick in a suicide note to Annabel in which he described her as "a beautiful shell,...perfectly formed, a pearly shell—but empty, devoid of the life it once held." (105)
Annabel does conceive a new life in her responsible commitment to the baby, but a life defined by the values of the past. She herself cannot attain the innocence and freedom of her child; at best, she can only retain the image of an ideal already lost for her. As was the case with January Marlow, Humphrey Place, and Freddy Hamilton, the possibility of personal fulfillment on the physical level is an echo for Annabel of no more real substance than a reverie. She has the child, it is true, in her feelings for whom, Malkoff suggests, she has "at least the possibility of developing a real self." But reality in Mrs. Spark's world defines the self in terms of sacrifice and withdrawal, the two elements which best describe Annabel's actions at the end of the novel. If she is the Christ-bearer, as Bufkin contends, her boarding the plane is not so reminiscent of the Assumption as it is of the Flight to Egypt. In any case, her role as mother and guardian can frustrate the dictates of reality only temporarily. The child as innocent may now occupy the stage, but in the wings waits inexorable experience. Like the other Madonna, Annabel can offer only temporary protection from a savage world.

Unfortunately, too much concentration on the allegorical aspects of the novel tends to reduce it to a theoretical abstract and detract from the central focus of attention. Imaginative and complex as his interpretation is, Bufkin's
sense of boundless affirmation at the novel's resolution is misleading. For The Public Image is basically about reality, its masks and its poses and finally its abiding truths. Innocence, love, marriage, art, and religion are all myths in the novel, all facades imposed by the camera on a backdrop of infidelity, sexual perversion, and madness. Frederick and Annabel's reputation as the ideal couple "is a living lie." (97) Marriage functions only as a means of social recognition, necessary to sustain the delusion of moral propriety at the same time as it cloaks the pursuit of private vice. Frederick's mistress is not in the least put out by the furtive nature of their affair, for she "understood the importance of marriage to everyone, let alone Frederick Christopher, and was content with his love-visits." (35-36) Whether attainable or not, the promise and possibility enjoined by the ideal of marriage was a controlling factor of vision in Mrs. Spark's other novels. In The Public Image, however, even the ideal vanishes. Annabel and Frederick's married life consists of their individual secret lives which each guards jealously from the other. What would scarcely seem the basis for mutual commitment and meaningful communication nevertheless elicits from the author a nod of resigned approval: "And, in the economy of things, these secrecies of the heart were not in themselves a bad basis for married love." (18)
The economy of things demands distortion and deception in order to hide the void gaping through the moral order. Film becomes the dominant form of artistic expression, providing moral comfort with the right amount of titillating artifice and depicting goodness with the proper injection of suggestive excitation. "Pure vices" form the Gospel of the sensational weeklies, "the only virtue which was explored being forgiveness, and this was passionately spread over the pages, most popular being forgiving wives and mothers." (25) Even Annabel demonstrates the lie and hypocrisy of this virtueless emotion when she tries to protect herself by proposing that her husband was driven to death by jealous women whom she, before the press and with a show of great courage, magnanimously forgives. Earlier, however, she had confided to her director that forgiveness was a matter of action and not of words or show:

"...now Frederick's dead with all this hell in his death--if I tell myself 'I forgive him' I'll never forgive him really. The best thing is to just go on as usual from where he jumped off--that's forgiving, really. You just pick up the pieces and get on with it." (111)

The consummate actor, Annabel is able at least for a while to employ her art in order to survive the impending scandal. On the whole, however, the true artists wilt and decay in the stagnant atmosphere of the film world. Mrs. Spark says of the various artistic types who flock to Rome
as to the Mecca of their dreams:

There were very few whose talents, in themselves, were poor, given faith, hope, and single-mindedness—and given the necessary opportunity, or, as it might be, the gift for seeking and grasping opportunities, any one of these versatile people might have done well in any one field. However, all that had not been to be, and so here they were in Rome putting away their inheritance of grace with an occasional poem, a job in an art gallery, a part in a film....(42)

The despair of art comes to be closely linked with the violence of insanity and the decay of spiritual values in giving body to the fomenting reality which underlies the celluloid myth of wholesome order. Walking through the sets of a large studio, Frederick comes upon a poet of recent acquaintance reading some of his work to a group of assistant producers. When he has finished, the men begin to respond as usual. Suddenly, however, "the poet, still dreamy-eyed,...lifted a thin alabaster ashtray and smashed it on the floor." (27) There is a quiet fury and taut uneasiness about the scene which serves to prefigure the mad violence of Frederick's desperate end. In the fantasy world created by roles and poses, madness begins to emerge as an all too true reality. The insane order of values according to which "Life is all the achievement of an effect" and "Only the animals remain natural" (37) breeds its own unnatural results. Just as Barbara Vaughan dis-
cerned in the Eichmann trial and Nicholas Farringdon discovered in both city and jungle, man becomes the savage animal, bent on the process of destruction. Annabel is re-proved for rebuking an insolent child, because "it was not customary to order children, however naughty, out of one's house, or call them beasts as if they were adults." (76) During the orgiastic party timed by Frederick to coincide with his death, an embodiment of the sordidness which is reality in the novel manifests itself to Annabel in the form of a middle-aged woman "wriggling" among "the all-screaming" dancers and "incongruously snaking her body with the young...." "The frightful thing" about her which no one else but Annabel notices is her dress--"a skinny, blurred, grey dress with a diamond-shaped cut-out in the front of the dress stretching from her waist-line to her thighs; in fact it was obscene." (53-54) The mysterious woman, about whom "Annabel could never be quite sure, afterwards, if [she]...had been real or imagined," (53) incorporates all the characteristics of those visions of evil at large in The Bachelors, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, and The Girls of Slender Means. The Snake creeps again in Mrs. Spark's world, no longer masked in an elegant Schiaparelli but giving full vent to all its vulgar obscenity. While the party rages, Frederick defiles the church with his suicide and blasphemes the martyrs with the lie he has so carefully
spun to conceal his true motives and link him to their company. Religious values are thus twisted to fit a web of diabolical madness, and the spiritual heritage sought in the excavated ruins beneath the church, as in the tunnel under Peckham Rye, gives way to abomination. It is not too surprising, therefore, that Annabel's latest movie, the one immediately threatened by the scandal, is supported by Vatican money.

Despite its affirmative conclusion, *The Public Image* remains a dark portrait of the moral order, now advanced in decay and tottering on the brink of chaos and insanity. Annabel does finally reject the temptation to which Freddy Hamilton succumbed; she refuses to follow her director's suggestion to "Burn those letters [Frederick's suicide notes] and wash the ashes down the washbasin." (130) Yet neither does she share the fulfilling happiness of Barbara Vaughan. Commitment for Annabel demands flight, poised for which she stands apart with the baby at the novel's end. What abides is the reality they flee, a world of experience grown less lucid and more decadent than ever before in Mrs. Spark's fiction. Though the theme of madness is present in most of the earlier novels, it reaches new proportions in *The Public Image*, actually dictating the major turn of events in line with its own warped distortions. Perversity and violence seethe beneath an exterior
of conformity and composure, and deceit becomes the truth of everyday life, both for the film makers and their idolatrous fans. Where Barbara Vaughan discerned by light of the Eichmann trial "an empty hole in the earth, that led to a bottomless pit," (344) Annabel Christopher sees "that profound pit" (64) beneath the structure of a church, where the search for spiritual foundation in the blood of the martyrs goes on. Only ruins remain for such a quest in an age when martyrs are maniacs, virtue is vice, and the movie magazine is the Gospel. Such a film and such a world are out of control.

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In The Driver's Seat madness takes full control of the wheel. The novel is very brief, like The Public Image, and simply details the last twenty-four hours or so in the life of Lise, an almost anonymous woman in quest of a boy-friend to murder her. A horrifying parody of the search for fulfillment which marks Mrs. Spark's other novels, The Driver's Seat illustrates the utter futility of trying to find an order for existence in a world driven by insane values and steered ever closer to the madhouse. Apparently suffering from a nervous breakdown, like Caroline Rose in The Comforters, Lise leaves her job in the North to travel South on a prescribed vacation. Whereas, however, Caroline's breakdown led to vision and the
joyful discovery of unity in multiplicity as the formal structure of reality, Lise's madness leads to the pit or void briefly described by Mrs. Spark in the two preceding novels but here fully illuminated in all its terrifying emptiness. Instead of love, Lise embraces death, perceiving only "how final is finality." (117) The pleasant fantasy that sex is child's play according to which Barbara Vaughan organizes her sense of truth is shattered by Lise's scream as she is raped and simultaneously stabbed to death by the sex maniac whom she has courted expressly for his services as her exterminator. Violence rends the world in *The Driver's Seat* while madness propels it toward that pit from which Barbara Vaughan and Annabel Christopher were able, each in her own way, to flee. There is no flight now but to terror.

With madness in the driver's seat from start to finish, Mrs. Spark tries to demonstrate how utterly maniacal is the direction of values in the modern world. At the beginning of the third chapter is stated Lise's goal and finish, the rest of the novel following her as she meticulously plots her course:

She will be found tomorrow morning dead from multiple stab wounds, her wrists bound with a silk scarf and her ankles bound with a man's necktie, in the grounds of an empty villa, in a part of the foreign city to which she is travelling on the flight now boarding at Gate 14. (25)
The first chapter opens with her shrieking at a sales-lady who tries to sell her "a stain-resisting dress" and proceeds to describe how she finds "the necessary dress," of material gaudy enough to draw attention to her as "she lays the trail" (54) and at the same time capable of holding and accentuating the bloodstains. Not only does Lise carefully arrange the immediate details of her murder, including the location, the implement, and even the scarf and tie to bind her hands and feet, but she so orders her every activity as to lead the authorities back to her as the prime agent of the frightful web she has spun. Thus she buys a book with a lurid cover which she keeps in full view "like an identification notice carried by a displaced person." (65) She makes herself unfor-gettable to those she encounters as she organizes events around her death so that they may later bear witness to her deliberation and purpose. Stuffing her passport down the back seat of a taxi, Lise attains an anonymity which will force the police to trace the trail she has laid, but even this crucial act is performed before the puzzled gaze of a companion. She retains control, just as she keeps her friend's car-keys when she leaves the North, and the insanity she wields and imposes with all its horror on others testifies to the power and order of chaos in her world.
Yet Lise is as much a victim of the milieu in which she moves inexorably toward her doom as she is its faithful mirror. The product of a rigid, systematized material order, she has spent over eighteen years of her life in the routine of an accountant's office, the center cog in the totem structure of power: "...she has five girls under her and two men. Over her are two women and five men." (6) Her private life reflects the sterile values of her environment. She lives in a one-room flat whose only feature is its pinewood interior, designed by a now famous architect "when he was young, unknown, studious and strict-principled." (11) There is, however, no life to the room other than the bare material itself, "for the furniture is all fixed, adaptable to various uses, and stackable." Lise keeps it as clean "as if it were uninhabited," so that what little natural beauty was left to the wood petrifies in the regimen of her order: "The swaying tall pines among the litter of cones on the forest floor have been subdued into silence and into obedient bulks." (11-12)

It is no shock therefore that Lise scarcely possesses an identity of her own. She is as anonymous as her world, whose only points of reference are the North and the South. Even the author is unsure of Lise, whose last name is never known. Her hair, writes Mrs. Spark, was "probably tinted" and her age "might be as young as twenty-nine or as
old as thirty-six, but hardly younger, hardly older." (16) But as to her interior life, "who knows what?...Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?" (51, 53) George Stade calls her one of Mrs. Spark's bachelors, "not religious nor able to marry,...possessed by the devils who are called up by repression to usurp one's freedom when one does not know how to regain it by offering it up to the church." The crux of her problem, he then asserts, stems from her inability to "affirm the oneness of Catholic reality," just as the theme of the novel, a disordered world, "is merely significant in relation to a religious order that can be evoked only by contrast to that which it is not." 8

While Stade correctly identifies the novel's theme, the dissatisfaction he expresses in regard to The Driver's Seat stems from his own undue emphasis on the Catholic viewpoint. If Lise were a Catholic, he seems to suggest, her ability to sacrifice herself to the will of God would appease her needs. Yet it is against just such a realization that Mrs. Spark has tried to direct her recent fiction, including The Driver's Seat. Except for Barbara Vaughan, who in retrospect seems to convince her author as little as she does the reader, the Catholic characters have increasingly demonstrated the inability of Catholic reality to sustain the individual in the physical order. The conflict of values constituting that reality demands
a sense of commitment which grew in the novels to such an impossible extreme that, with *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Mrs. Spark tried to reconcile the opposing elements and reduce the conditions of responsibility. The ploy involved juggling Catholic theology, however, and only because of the trickery was the happy resolution accomplished. On the other hand, it was non-Catholic Freddy, without the benefit of theological maneuvers, who suffered frustration. As she then went on to demonstrate in *The Public Image*, it is not only Catholic reality (i.e., the two-fold order of spiritual and material values) but bare material reality itself which demands of the individual a responsible commitment to the terms of his existence. To be a responsible mother and retain any sense of her own integrity, the movie star must make a sacrifice in her own world akin to that demanded of the Catholic in his. The factor of moral responsibility pervades both worlds as does the fact of a morally corrupt physical order. It is this reality which Mrs. Spark explores in *The Driver's Seat*, a reality that can be viewed from the Catholic perspective but is in fact defined by the moral perspective.

Lise's identity is a projection of her world, which in *The Driver's Seat* is devoid of any true value or worth. The only realities are violence, madness, perversity, and loneliness. She says that she will know her boy-friend by the
"lack of an absence" (76) she will feel in his presence. The void of her life comes to be filled with death, and the only revery of which she is capable on the night of her murder recalls "the inconceivable sorrow of... chairs piled up at night when you're sitting in a cafe, the last one left." (105) A past whose lone substance is sorrow distracts her momentarily from the future whose lone reality is death. "I want to go home, I think," she says, "I want to go back home and feel all that lonely grief again." (105) Even when she is forced to invent a more substantial past for herself, the lie partakes of the same negative truths. She confesses to a man who consoles her after a student demonstration and later tries to rape her that she is a widow with no children, her husband, "a bad driver, anyway," (83) having been killed in an automobile accident. Her own controlling vision as she drives everything toward her death is a bitter extension of a similar statement by Ronald Bridges in The Bachelors: "It's best never to be born. I wish my mother and father had practised birth-control. I wish that pill had been invented at the time." (82)

During her day-long pilgrimage to death, Lise's encounters with the mad realities of the world about her illustrate the fact that her own private insanity is but the image of a more general global disorder. Violence
foments on every level of society. Royalty is deposed and the social order overthrown by a military coup in a mid-Eastern country. The paths of the exiled Sheik and his wives briefly cross that of Lise, indicating that the destiny of the political order is on the same wild careen as her own. Another individual whom she meets on the plane and later sees at the same hotel as the Sheik turns out to be a member of the ruling class, grandly addressed by his chauffeur as "m'lord." (43) Yet just as the Sheik has lost his throne, so has the lord of society lost his rational faculties. Recuperating at his villa near the city from some type of mental disorder, he is still every bit as crazy as Lise and can talk to her about nothing but hunting and the proper way to track and kill big game. Lise also witnesses the arguments which ensue in a department store when a hippy, an undesirable because of his beard and clothing, is forced to leave the building by two "blue-suited" agents. A young girl in pigtails tries to defend the bearded youth, telling the assembled crowd, "They think they're in America where if they don't like a man's face they take him out and shoot him." Her protest, however, is angrily rejected by a man in the throng: "You couldn't see his face for the hair. Go back where you came from, little whore! In this country, we..." (67-68) Later Lise herself is nearly trampled to death when she is caught in a
clash between student demonstrators and police. She does manage to extricate herself from the situation so that she can keep her appointment with death, but the world remains fixed on its course of political unrest, blind prejudice, and maniacal violence. Power is in the hands of madmen and despots, who clutch the wheel as firmly and disastrously as Lise.

In the spiritual sphere, values reside in the testament of Mrs. Fiedke, a Jehovah's Witness, and a man named Bill, for whom "Macrobiotics is a way of life." (66) For Mrs. Fiedke, the problems of life are resolved absolutely by her newly-discovered religion. "I have no problems any more," she confides to Lise and proceeds to identify the mainstay of her faith as the refusal to question or doubt "some things which you can't." (66) Apparently one of those things beyond doubt is the fact that all hippies are hermaphrodites, as she reassures Lise, so that "It isn't their fault." (67) Despite the power of her faith to sustain and enrich her life, Mrs. Fiedke's trust in safety is firmly based on the principles of the physical order. Though she once again confesses her religion to Lise—"I'm a strict believer, in fact, a Witness"—she still refuses to fly in planes "from those countries where the pilots believe in the after-life." "You are safer," she insists, "when they don't." (74) Poor Mrs. Fiedke has yet to learn
the bitter lesson of Mrs. Spark's world which Nicholas Farringdon discovered in *The Girls of Slender Means*—nowhere's safe. Her nephew, whose arrival from a mental clinic she awaits with great solicitude, fulfills her intuition in regard to Lise: "It is in my mind...that you and my nephew are meant for each other. As much as anything, my dear, you are the person for my nephew." (75) They are the perfect match, it turns out, but not in the way she had foreseen. Lise wins the murderer she wants, while the anonymous nephew gains the victim of his desires. Their ideal relationship stems from their mutual madness and gives birth to perversion and death.

Bill, on the other hand, uses his twin philosophies of Yin and Yang,10 representing the basic polarities of all material reality, to structure the movement based on macrobiotic foods, of which he is "an Enlightenment leader." (34) Macrobiotics, he says, "is a cleansing diet," (34) and functions as a physical, mental, and spiritual purgative. What he is most concerned with, however, is the physical, in regard to which he must have his daily orgasm if he is to fulfill the requirements of his diet. Lise therefore becomes the Yin of his Yang upon whom he tries to exercise the sexual duties of his diet. According to his way of life, all values are regulated by physical intake and output. Sex is a function affecting
the digestive system, not the spirit. "You become what you eat," (35) he confides to Lise, an especially appropriate dogma of the movement in light of Lise's earlier remark: "You look like Red Riding-Hood's grandmother. Do you want to eat me up?" (27) A religion such as his does literally devour the spirit only to excrete a waste of corrupted values. While Lise can avoid his jaws and paws, she cannot escape the void she has become, mirroring the void of principles and values in a world that waits to chew her up. In a sense, she is already the product of the digestive system of a ravenous physical order just as her madness, loss of identity, and violent death are its sustaining properties. One does become what one eats. Three times in the novel Lise literally assumes the driver's seat of a stolen car. Yet twice she is forced to the action as a means of flight from men who try to rape her. Even when she takes her friend's car-keys with her from the North, Mrs. Spark remarks that it is impossible to tell whether her failure to leave them was deliberate or whether she was distracted by the mocking laughter of the doorman. (15) Though she clutches the wheel firmly as she drives her murderer to the spot she has selected for her death, by this time Mrs. Spark has demonstrated that her insane rush toward destruction is merely consonant with and symptomatic of her milieu. Lise's violent end provides
the vivid answer to macrobiotic Bill's lecture topic, "The World--Where is it Going?" (100)

The full terror of The Driver's Seat lies in the absolutely unavailing nature of its conclusion, a quality in Mrs. Spark's fiction which is appropriately shared thus far only by the novel which follows. The inexorable fate which rises to a climax of futility and despair is the inescapable lot of both murderer and victim. Lise tells Mrs. Fiedke's nephew, "You'll get caught, but at least you'll have the illusion of a chance to get away in the car." (116) Her own demands are small enough: "I don't want any sex.... You can have it afterwards. Tie my feet and kill, that's all. They will come and sweep it up in the morning." (116) The impersonal "it" represents the utter abasement Lise has realized, and yet even the bleak fulfillment she seeks in death is denied her as, despite all her protests, her murderer "plunges into her, with the knife poised high."(117) Only afterwards does he tie the feet of the corpse.

What was an image of at least partial affirmation at the end of The Public Image becomes in The Driver's Seat a symbol of negation and horror. Annabel Christopher was compared to a shell that held within it the echo of promise and the memory of renewal. When the authorities question Lise's murderer, however, they pursue an endless round of interrogations, "moving slowly forward, always
bearing the same questions like the whorling shell of a snail." (115) For they are "already beset by inquietude and fear," and they try desperately to "reason with him in their secret dismay that the evidence already coming in seems to confirm his story." (115) At the heart of the shell in The Driver's Seat is the horror of Lise's preordained will to destruction: the role of evil in the world which it suggests and the presence of the void it implies. There is no echo of promise or renewal in the plea of the innocent murderer to his captors: "She told me to kill her and I killed her....She told me precisely what to do. I was hoping to start a new life." (117) The explanation falls on deaf, unwilling ears because it is too horrible, too frightening to comprehend. Yet the vision, if not the plea, is inescapable and just as terrifying, just as maddeningly true. Mrs. Spark concludes:

He sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen's uniforms, hears the cold and the confiding, the hot and the barking voices, sees already the holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear. (117)

In The Driver's Seat vision perceives finality in terms of madness and destruction. Lise sees the abyss and rushes to it, nowhere else to go, while the Law, once symbolic in Mrs. Spark's fiction as the mouthpiece of order, cringes ineffectually behind force and show to protect itself from
the overwhelming reality of disorder. Religion and sex become mutual functions of a deranged digestion or, in the case of Mrs. Fiedke, a blind, consoling myth. Art is productive in architecture only of sterility and in literature of lurid banality. Those values which existed as distant possibilities in the earliest novels now vanish absolutely and completely, while the gesture of withdrawal in the later novels, even to the extent of martyrdom, becomes in The Driver's Seat a flight into suicidal fantasy as violently real as the general madness which steers the world, uncontrollably, to its fate. The direction of the course is plotted; the next signpost is Not To Disturb.

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Not since The Bachelors has the onslaught of night dominated the fiction of Muriel Spark as it does in her latest novel. Ronald Bridges prowled the streets of midnight London at the conclusion of the former book in a futile attempt to resolve the problem of good and evil, and the darkness settled uncomfortably on his wanderings. The entire action of Not To Disturb on the other hand, takes place during a storm-wrenched evening of ghastly carryings-on in a manorial estate located on the outskirts of wintry Geneva, and at the end "the sunlight is laughing on the walls"11 inside which have occurred a double murder, a suicide, and the grotesque marriage of the cretinous heir
to a pregnant chambermaid while outside in the grounds a pair of sexual perverts have been struck and killed by a bolt of lightning. Resolution there is, no doubt, but at what horrible expense and to what avail. The night is one of watching for the domestic staff, headed by a sinister but most effective butler named Lister, and the event over which they keep "faithful vigil" (121) is the violent end of their master, mistress, and her lover, whose name ironically is Victor. It is an event which they have foreseen as preordained, the consummation of which they await cheerfully and with great expectation, for they are the new inheritors, the reapers of dissolution and perversion and the servants of destruction. The world of *Not To Disturb* is their world, Lister's world, the house which is "run like the solar system" (15) under the full control of him for whom, until the black night has run its course, "There remain a good many things to be accomplished and still more chaos effectively to organize." (55) Her latest novel, despite its innocent title, is Muriel Spark's most disturbing—a book, writes Jonathan Raban, "about the exercise of free will in a seemingly abandoned universe suspended only from the thread of grace and the promise of divine redemption." 12 The absolute wreckage of the moral order intimated by the fearful direction of *The Driver's Seat* seems even more imminent in *Not To Disturb*. As Bruce
Allen notes, "A genteel holocaust appears to lie in wait for us all."¹³

Chaos is at the fore and center of the novel, within and without the walls of the estate, about and beyond the environs of Geneva. The Klopstock Manor, possessed of evil, corruption, and madness, becomes Mrs. Spark's metaphor for a world grown perverse and decadent on its own values. Together with Victor Passerat, the Baron and Baronness form a trinity of unnatural passions, productive only of their own annihilation. As Clovis the cook remarks, "the eternal triangle has come full circle." (29) Having committed themselves to the pursuit of sexual experimentation and deviation, the three, pronounces Lister, "have placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realm of predestination." (45) The Baron cannot cope with his wife's newborn natural affection for Passerat and so brings their sordid ménage à trois to its bloody end behind the locked doors of the library where, he tells the servants, they are not to be disturbed. Nor is their destiny unique. For upon finding their bodies in the morning, Lister places a telephone call to Argentina, halfway around the world, in order to inform the youngest Klopstock brother of the event, only to be told by the butler that the Count has locked himself in the study with some friends and is not to be disturbed for any reason. Lister's reply is as
ominous as the message he receives: "...we hope against hope to hear from the Count when morning dawns in Rio." (118)

The doom of the Klopstocks is the doom of the moral order itself. When they fall, victims of their own corruption, the world in which they hold an eminence by reason of title and standing reflects the toppling of a whole system of principles and values structured by the ages. "Descendant of the Crusaders," (116) the Klopstock line inherits a tradition of Faith, integrity, and allegiance to ideals of the spirit. Yet in the Klopstock manor, as in the modern world, that inheritance is squandered for a destructive pleasure principle that nullifies the past even as it gives birth to monstrous offspring for the future. To Lister and the domestic staff fall the birthrights of the Klopstocks by reason of pregnant Heloise's midnight marriage to the Klopstock heir, a raving lunatic howling in the night from his boarded cell at the top of the house. His cries echo the raging of the storm as Lister—who "never disparates, he symmetrises," who's "got equibalance,...and what's more, he pertains" (73)—creates the brave new world over which he rules, wielding as power the twin precepts of money and pleasure. The Driver's Seat depicted the abolition of an old order due to violence, madness, and perversion of values, but the
novel concluded on a note of terrified vision, the police trying to hide behind the facade of their authority from the frightening awareness of a truth that will not be denied. Ruin betrays itself by what it produces. The authorities in *Not To Disturb*, however, see only that which Lister wishes them to see. For months he and his staff have been preparing news releases, Hollywood scripts, and background sketches in anticipation of the night's events. And the killings occur "according to the script." (83) As the servants mull over the possibility of the Baron summoning them to the library and thus interrupting the flow of the fatal argument, Lister interposes the conclusive factor: "They've as good as gone to Kingdom Come....However, it is I who decide whether or not we answer any summons, hypothetical or otherwise." "It's Lister who decides," (29) seconds his aunt: Lister who both proposes and disposes. He is in the driver's seat, and he directs reality as he will, to the profit of himself and his friends. At the end of the novel, the servants gain control of the Klopstock inheritance by dint of a contrived marriage, hastily arranged on grounds of a false paternity claim and consummated only in the eye of the camera. Truth is the delusion which abides according to Lister's scheme of order, the fruit of chaos thriving on chaos. As he says of his biographical profile created to
suit the public eye, so might he evaluate the reality of order molded to his image and likeness: "It isn't true, but that's not to say it isn't right." (52)

The demise of established values, already in an advanced state of decay, is absolute and complete upon Lister's ascendancy. The corruption of the social order intimated in The Driver's Seat by revolution and the senility of the ruling class takes a more insidious turn at the end of Not To Disturb. Prince Eugene, a friend of the Klopstocks and a member of the royal family, is reduced to begging Lister to arrange the details of marriage between himself and Irene, a parlour-maid at the Klopstock manor. In control of every situation, Lister arranges the new order to supplant rather than abolish the old, just as the bastard child of a chambermaid will continue the Klopstock line. The heritage of the past is thus stifled under a pretext of propriety and renewal, and the death-rattle of the old order is drowned in the cry of its new-born mutation.

Spiritual authority shares a similar fate. The decadence of the Klopstocks mirrors a similar corruption of religious ideals in a world given over entirely to the physical and material. Lister remarks that the parquet-flooring and the doorknobs of the house once belonged to a deposed king who, when forced to flee his country,
reacted as royalty always does: "They take everything, like stage-companies who need their props."
Concerning this reliance on external show as a means of retaining a vestige of the lost past, he then goes on to draw a revealing comparison between royalty, the Baron, and the Pope:

"With royalty, of course, it all is largely a matter of stage production. And Lighting. Royalty are very careful about their setting and lighting. As is the Pope. The Baron resembled royalty and the Pope in that respect at least." (33-34)

The function of Rome as the center of Catholicism and Christianity seems as impotent and futile as it did in The Public Image. In that novel, the search for a spiritual inheritance in the tombs of the martyrs resulted in a suicide; Not To Disturb suggests a similar lack of substance to spiritual influence every bit as profound and hollow as the pit into which Frederick Christopher leaped with such insane purpose. As Lister declaims about the predestined fate of the Klopstocks, he is told that he talks "like a Secretary of State to the Vatican." (45) His interpretations of the phenomena about him, however, would seem to place his station even higher. For all practical purposes, Lister is infallible. To his aunt's remark that "Only technically is the not impossible, possible", he responds authoritatively, "We are not discussing possibilities today....Today we speak of
facts." (3) And the facts pertain to life and death, power and control, all of which are accomplished to Lister's will.

Even as Lister defines reality, so do he and the servants give it form. In this way, Not To Disturb also explores the role of the artist according to the new dispensation given birth during the long night. Yet the tradition according to which the emerging artist functions is that handed down by the Klopstocks. Representative of their owner's world, the works of art in the manor reflect a narrow vision and false perspective. The drawing-room, for instance, is fitted on a miniature scale that is out of place. "There are no larger pictures," Mrs. Spark points out, "such as would fit it." A Monet and a Goya "of the smaller scale" are singled out as are a series of small family portraits, from which the author concludes:

...it seems as if the inclination towards the miniature is either a trait descending through a few generations to their present owner, or else these little portraits have been cleverly copied, more recently, from some more probable larger originals. (31-32)

Either the vision of the artist has dwindled in relation to the reality he reflects, or else his work is a sham. In either case, the product reflects the unnatural world of the Klopstocks in its natural process of decay.

That decadence is given its most sordid form by the
stag films in which the whole household participates—master, mistress, and servants. The Baron, in fact, is a pornophile, so dedicated to his sexual aberrations that he cannot cope with the "natural" behavior of his wife when she takes a lover, just as he cannot father a child. Consequently, his role as an artist of the perverse, giving form to his sexual fantasies at the expense of reality, is quite literally his doom. For Lister and the staff, however, the art of the film becomes a means of transformation from the commonplace of their domestic positions to an eminence of wealth and power. As Jonathan Raban indicates, "The action of the novel is repeatedly referred to as 'the scene', and the servants are its industrious stage cameras."\(^{14}\) Whether writing the script for a Hollywood production of the very real drama still in the process of its denouement or selling memoirs to Stern and Paris-Match, the servants are behind the action, under the watchful eye of Lister, directing the sequence of events to its dire conclusion and to their own reward.

Mr. Samuel and Mr. McGuire, hired by the Baron ostensibly as secretaries, are actually retained for their genius in producing the sex films. McGuire handles the soundtrack and Samuel uses the camera to coax the actors and actresses to give vent to their fantasies and to capture this distorted reality on film. Yet what the
camera sees is often indicative of a very real and frightening distortion of established truths in the world outside the estate. "The Baronness shows up good doing the nun in the Congo," says Pablo, one of the young servants, "with Eleanor doing the Princess bit." (72) While the Baronness enacts a perversion of spiritual values, Eleanor, a serving-girl, pretends to a social status which, by reason of the night's events, she might well attain. For McGuire and Samuel are actually in the service of Lister, who uses their unique talents to transpose reality into whatever guise or mold suits his scheme of order. McGuire, for instance, assists in the preparation of statements for the news media and diligently records the marriage pronouncement which wills the estate into the trust and care of the staff. With the click of his lens, Samuel catches the Reverend who performs the ceremony reaching for a drink and transforms the action into a gesture of blessing. An unsuccessful attack upon his pregnant bride by the lumbering Klopstock heir becomes in the eye of the camera the seal of validity upon their nuptials, the recorded proof of consummation. "Mr. Samuel is an artist," Heloise acknowledges and then cites the peculiar power of his genius, "his perspectives coalesce." (71) Indeed they do, as the lie is merged with the truth, banality with benediction, and innocence with guilt. Art accommodates everything to
the grasp of the domestic staff. Since she is now the Baronness, Heloise greedily asserts, the Monet and the Goya are hers. Their practice as actors in the stag films will hold the experienced servants in good stead since Hollywood accepts their script as well as their offer to star in the projected movie about the tragedy of the Klopstocks. They all reap the profits of their labors according to the highest bidder seeking their services. Though they themselves, as Lister comments, "have been such stuff as dreams are made of all through the stormy night," (108) the reality which endures is the nightmare of their creation.

In such a world, it is only natural that love be unnatural and marriage but a parody of commitment and responsibility. The Klopstock manor, a pleasure-dome of vice and sensuality, witnesses and countenances almost every form of sexual perversion, from homosexuality to incest. The Baron and Baronness use their marriage as a cover for untrammelled licence and unrestrained sexual freedom. So channelled are their energies in its pursuit that sex becomes the only fundamental reality of their lives, a physical ideal which, by the very nature of its uncontrolled passion, leads to violence and death. Reflecting on the Klopstocks' obsession with sex, Lister concludes:
"How like...the death wish is to the life-urge! How urgently does an overwhelming obsession with life lead to suicide! Really, it's best to be half-awake and half-aware. That is the happiest stage." (14)

What destroys the Klopstocks is sex, which "On their sphere," Lister adds, "...is nothing but an overdose of life." Clovis's addendum--"To be precise, it is of violence that they shortly die" (14)--is not a contradiction, only a clarification. From a coalescence of perspectives emerges the reality that sex and life and violence are the triune facts of existence, one and the same, in an order in which the physical is worshipped as the golden calf. Destruction and sterility can be its only offspring.

Lister and friends, however, who are every bit as sexually perverse as their master and mistress, survive the collapse of the Klopstock world only because they balance the pleasure principle with material values. Rather than idealists, which in a sense the Baron and his wife are, the servants are eminently practical, organizing their future for pleasure with the aid of wealth. "Money," (46) Lister bluntly announces to the Prince when he inquires how the Klopstocks obtained his services, and it is with a view toward money and power, and next toward pleasure, that he enlists the others in his creation of a new order, established on the dual basis of
material and physical values. Passion yields to cunning as the dominant influence, while sex remains a pleasurable commodity to be manipulated, like marriage, for one's needs. Lister reigns supreme as the lord of his creation in all his pomp and works.

What most disturbs about Muriel Spark's latest novel is the absence of any redeeming vision. In her previous novels, even the most unrelenting, there was a sense of awareness on the part of at least one individual whereby goodness and evil were glimpsed in their proper perspective and the reality of a moral order ascertained at least by its conflicts. Ronald Bridges may be plagued by demons in The Bachelors, but his Faith provides a means of endurance if not of consolation. Nicholas Farringdon's martyrdom may seem incomprehensible to the girls of slender means, but merely because they are unable to see his death as an act of commitment against the evil he discovers on their roof. Even the police at the end of The Driver's Seat, despite their efforts to dispel the truth, must experience the fear and pity which have more and more come to be its accompanying properties. But Lister's victory in Not To Disturb is total, and no one but his accomplices the wiser. Nature herself seems his willing ally as a haphazard "slapdash" bolt of lightning, "like a self-stricken flash-photographer, and like a zip-fastener ripped from its
garment by a sexual maniac," (109) strikes Victor Passerat's two homosexual friends— who Mr. Samuel says are "only extras" (108)—thereby eliminating what may have been undesirable and embarrassing testimony concerning the night's events. The faithful vigil is well-kept, its dark secrets even applauded, absurdly, by the laughing sun which rises on a new but oh so different day.

By far the most negative of all her novels thus far, *Not To Disturb* recapitulates the major themes of Mrs. Spark's fiction under the jaundiced eye of the absurdist. Since *The Mandelbaum Gate* and her great failure to synthesize the moral order in terms of comfortable unity instead of deadly conflict, the novels have partaken more of the world of a Kafka and a Beckett than of the traditional Christian reality. Where before she had always used a Catholic as her hero or heroine, this distinguishing characteristic drops out altogether in *The Public Image* and *The Driver's Seat* and is resurrected in *Not To Disturb* only as a grotesque irony. The Klopstocks are Catholics, but scarcely the best representatives of vision and responsibility, while the heir to their fortune and name, also a Catholic and the last of a line that goes back to the Crusaders, is a raving lunatic. Rome is the capital of sin instead of virtue in *The Public Image*, while in *Not To Disturb* the Papacy is likened to an overthrown monarchy,
dependent for authority on its external trappings. Barbara Vaughan does elect a redemptive and most accommodating Catholic reality in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, but the vision from which she turns away, not because of its falseness but its terror, is the numbing uncertainty and seeming futility experienced by Beckett's tramps as they wait for the inexplicable Godot. Annabel Christopher likewise seeks redemption, now very obviously in flight from the sin and sensation of Italy, and *The Public Image* concludes with her waiting to board a plane to Greece: "that is," concludes Malkoff, "symbolically to search out the origins of the Romans' adopted culture."\(^\text{15}\) Bufkin expands this concept even further:

Annabel's steady movement Eastward is a figuration of an advancement toward salvation, with Athens connoting her progress toward a classical unity of being and away from the romantic fragmentation of Italy, the "Motherland of Sensation." Symbolically she is retracing experience and meanings back to their older, more natural beginnings.\(^\text{16}\)

The nature of her findings, however, might be darkly gleaned from the novel which follows, whose heroine also boards a plane to come South in search of a fate that is fulfilled in brutal death. Lise's destiny, the goal of her quest, is ironically discovered as she visits the ruins which are the heart of the city. "It just came to me," declares Mrs. Fiedke, "while we were looking at those very interesting
pavements in that temple up there, that poor Richard [her
tenew] may be the very man you're looking for." (76) What
she finds is a debasing end to an anonymous existence,
every bit as coldly violent as Joseph K's in The Trial and
as crude and bleak as the death of Gregor Samsa, another
"it" whose remains are as efficiently swept away in The
Metamorphosis as Lise says hers will be in The Driver's
Seat.

More than any of her other novels, Not To Disturb re-
veals the influence of those modern French writers whose
themes Mrs. Spark described in The Mandelbaum Gate as
"despair, going nowhere for nothing." (210) Clovis the
cook who writes the Hollywood script, recalls another
servant and cook, Clov in Samuel Beckett's despairing
Endgame, while Mr. Samuel, the artist for whom perspectives
coalesce, suggests the master of the absurd himself. More-
over, his faithful assistant McGuire may represent
Beckett's many "M" characters whose inconsequential lives
embody his themes. Even the dialogue, which sometimes
seems to go nowhere for nothing, sounds like Ionesco or
Beckett. The debate between Lister and his aunt about the
possibility of their marriage is the best example of an
argument that seems as irrational as it is "a tight, un-
breakable statement of the times at hand," (210) the phrase
Mrs. Spark used in The Mandelbaum Gate to describe the
effect and purpose of the new literature in France:

He says, "In France an aunt may marry a nephew."
"No, Lister, I stand by the Table of Kindred and Affinity. I don't want to get heated at this moment, on this night, Lister. You're starting me off. The press and the police are coming, and there are only sixty-four shopping days to Christmas."
"I was only suggesting," he says, "I'm only giving you a little thought for when all this is over."
"It's going too far. You have to keep your unreasonable demands within bounds. I'm old fashioned beyond my years. One thought at a time is what I like." (36)

The approach of Christmas, no longer a commemoration of the wedding of the spiritual and physical, divine and human, in the Incarnation but only a season of buying and spending, is linked up with the gruesome events of the night and worries about statements for the press and the police as Eleanor's reasons for not listening to Lister's pleas. The implication can only be that her scruples, once she has time to think about them, will pass as quickly as the sixty-four shopping days.

As a sign of the times at hand, however, it is Lister who most embodies the despair and bleakness of the absurdist influence. For Lister discovers a unity of being for which so many of Mrs. Spark's characters strive in vain. Like a litany of his attributes are the praises of his minions in the Klopstock house: "Lister's got equibalance...and what's
more, he pertains." "Definitely", (73) summarizes one of the staff in an assertion as emphatic as an "Amen". And indeed Lister does seem the "vigilant manipulator" of the insane universe in which he lives and moves and has being. **Not To Disturb** is Muriel Spark's most frightening portrait of a world which sanctifies estrangement from moral values, deifies disorder, and revels exultantly in chaos. Morality disappears as heaven descends to earth in the form of material and physical well-being. Perversion and lies become the new Commandments, and gold the idol of worship. Lister's reach never exceeds his grasp, and that's what hell is about. That's what **Not To Disturb** is about.

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The novels of Muriel Spark represent an extended effort to give form to the reality of a moral order in the context of man's life and the world in which he functions as an individual. By its very nature that order is informed by an irreconcilable conflict between physical and spiritual values, and from **The Comforters** to **The Girls of Slender Means** Mrs. Spark demonstrates how that realization gradually destroys any sense of possible fulfillment in an impossible union. **The Mandelbaum Gate** merely confirms by its own failure the author's inability to restore a measure of balance to the struggle and to alleviate the unyielding commitment to responsibility demanded of the individual.
In her last three novels, Mrs. Spark contracts her vision to the immediate field of combat, the physical world, and appraises the dilemma of moral choice exclusively from that level. The results are a growing sense of futility and an increasing concentration on madness, perversion, and violence, the natural conditions of a corrupt and unnatural world. The individual at first flees in The Public Image, and then, driven insane, seeks destruction as the only alternative in The Driver's Seat. By the time of Not To Disturb the physical order is revealed in all the frightful absurdity spawned when it alone constitutes the whole of reality.

From the joyful exuberance of The Comforters to the absurd laughter of Not To Disturb, Mrs. Spark has brought her talents as artist and moralist to bear on the responsibility of man's choice in ordering his life to the reality of existence. The world which he encounters is a ravaged battleground of values, and he must take sides. Only in terms of a moral perspective can there be glimpsed a hope for peace, and then not in the physical present but in the spiritual future with the last of the Four Last Things. The vision persists as relentlessly as the demands of commitment--the abiding terror of the Christian dilemma. Now is the struggle and now the despair to preserve order and sanity in a disordered and insane world.
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI


   E. G. Bufkin, rev. of *The Public Image*, *Georgia Review*, XXVI (Spring, 1972), 106.

5. Bufkin, p. 106.


9. The scene is reminiscent of the setting, as well as the mood, of one of Hemingway's most despairing stories, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place."

10. It is possible that Mrs. Spark derives her idea of Bill's Yin and Yang fixation from a recent study of the modern novel by Anthony Burgess, in which he entitles the chapter dealing with female British writers "Yin and Yang." Burgess identifies Yin as feminine, yielding, and of a prose-style that is "careful, exquisite, full of qualified statements," while Yang is masculine, forceful, and of a style "less scrupulous, coarser, more aggressive." He uses the scheme to designate the difference between novelists like Elizabeth Bowen (Yin) and Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark (both Yang). Mrs. Spark is cited for her "cold violence...which tends to take grotesque turns" and criticized for "a lack of the old ruthlessness and magic" in *The Mandelbaum Gate* that spices her other novels. *The Driver's Seat*, replete with all those elements, might place her once again in the good graces of Burgess. See *The Novel Now: A Guide to Contemporary Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1967), pp. 119-131.


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